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**Carlo Emilio Gadda as Catholic
and Man of Science: The Case of
*Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via
Merulana***

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The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed exclusively by myself, that it is my own work and that no part of it has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Christopher John Ferguson

Stoneyburn, 16th of May 2012.

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, my dad and Sarah.

Abstract

The present study looks at the influence that two of the major cultural forces of the twentieth century had on the output of Carlo Emilio Gadda. It grew out of a search for ways of discussing Gadda and in particular his 1957 novel *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* that would be accessible to the widest possible audience. Ten chapters in length, the study treats first the influence that Christianity and in particular Italian Catholicism had on the avowedly atheist writer over five chapters, paying attention to the saints and holy places used in Gadda's output, then moves on to consider the importance of his scientific training as an engineer and his interest in physics in the second half. Aside from examining the text of *Quer pasticciaccio* and other works such as *Cognizione del dolore* and *La Madonna dei filosofi*, I have used biographical information and in particular data gleaned from research in Gadda's own personal library. The aims of the study are to introduce the reader unfamiliar with Gadda to his work, to offer a new framework by which the Gadda scholar may consider the Gran Lombardo, and to suggest new solutions to the unending puzzle that is *Quer pasticciaccio*.

Gadda texts are referred to in the thesis by the following abbreviations:

Acquainted with Grief – AG

Cognizione del dolore - CDD

Eros e Priapo – EP

Giornale di guerra e prigionia – GGP

Ingegnere fantasia: lettere a Ugo Betti – IF

La madonna dei filosofi - MF

Meditazione milanese – MM

Le meraviglie d'Italia - MI

"Per favore, mi lasci nell'ombra": interviste 1950-1972 – PF

The Philosophers' Madonna –PM

Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana - QP

Romanzi e racconti I – RRI

Romanzi e racconti II –RRII

Saggi, giornali, favole, e altri scritti - SGF

Scritti vari e postumi – SVP

That Awful Mess on Via Merulana – AM

I viaggi, la morte – VM

Villa in Brianza - VB

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Introduction

My love for Gadda's writing began only in my final year as an undergraduate through the course "Cleaning Up the Mess" at the University of Edinburgh, and it struck me at the time that so little had been done in terms of Gadda in the English-speaking world: there were only two books translated into English – *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* which is translated as *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana* (AM) and *Cognizione del dolore*, which appears as *Acquainted With Grief* (AG) – few critical works – Sbragia's *The Modern Macaronic* and Dombroski's *Creative Entanglements* being two of the more important book-length surveys – and, surprisingly (to me), not much enthusiasm, it seemed, for a process of evangelisation from inside Italy.

It is a little less than a decade since those days, and things that were beginning, in truth, to change even then are now making themselves felt. In Edinburgh, the *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* has matured, sending out shoots in many directions; new critics have emerged from various backgrounds, standing out from the previous generation (Mileschi, Marchesini, Donnarumma) and unafraid of controversy; in the UK, the name of Gadda has begun to circulate

outside of the Universities: a new translation has appeared (*The Philosophers' Madonna*) and *Quer pasticciaccio* was used as the first text in a BBC documentary on Italian crime fiction (*Italian Noir*), Fabrizio Gifuni, star of stage and screen, is making plans to have his successful play *L'ingegner Gadda va alla guerra* translated and performed over here. Now is an exciting time for the Gadda reader.

My central concern – the “making accessible” of Gadda – has become more relevant than ever, even if some who have come before me have deemed it a useless task. D. L. Fairservice, author of a PhD thesis on Gadda at Edinburgh in the year of my birth considered that “both by temperament and by choice, Gadda was a difficult and complex writer” (Fairservice 1), an opinion not too far from Gianfranco Contini’s belief that Gadda was only for the “happy few” (Contini 1989 75). Such a view could not be disregarded, even were it not to come from as august and important a critic in the Italian literary sphere as Contini, one of the first to champion Gadda, comparing him to Rabelais and Joyce as early as 1931. However, as taken by Gadda as I was, I felt the ‘happy few’ could yet be extended, and considered how I could present his fiction in an original way.

My methodology was simple enough in this regard. I have chosen to focus most of my efforts on one novel: *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. Taking my cue from studies in comparative literature, I have applied broad thematic readings to this novel, with focus on the themes of Catholicism and Science. These are two subjects that I have a particular interest for and, when put together, are pleasingly incongruous. However, both are important to Gadda's biography.

The choice of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* was not difficult: it was the first of Gadda's work that I had experienced, and it is still my favourite to this day. The genre of detective fiction is one that interests me greatly from both a historical and theoretical point of view, and is one of the key ways that interest in Gadda might be transmitted into the English-speaking world. Furthermore, it is readily available in translation, while the only other full-length novel that has been translated into English is nowadays difficult to find. Having made my decision to concentrate mainly on a single work and apply the themes of Catholicism and Science to it, I was largely guided by the writing itself: much of my work consisted of close and careful reading and interpretation of the novel.

This has meant that, while I have found much of the critical literature useful in my preparations, it has not always been foremost in my mind, nor has it necessarily shaped my conclusions.

As the intention of the work is to provide a kind of introduction to Gadda for the reader, it is essential that we detail who the author is, what his background was and detail some of the problems that have – until fairly recently – hampered his assimilation into the Italian canon as seen from abroad.

His reception in Italy and abroad has been complicated also by his apparent adherence to the fascist government of Mussolini in Italy. Despite his later vehement repudiation of the regime in his essay *Eros e Priapo*, an element of suspicion still hangs over his work for some members of the reading public. This is due both to certain articles that Gadda published as journalism, appearing to praise the fascist policies in Abyssinia and in terms of military preparation – articles that have not been included in the collected works – and to what his cousin Gadda Conti called “una estrema prudenza” (Gadda Conti 66) [extreme carefulness] in the face of the regime. In almost the same breath, Gadda Conti reminds us that among Carlo Emilio’s many contradictions, that of

being a “rabbioso ribelle e un ossequiente conformista” (ibid) [rabid rebel and an obsequious conformer] simultaneously should not surprise us too much.

Whatever the truth of Gadda’s feelings towards the regime of Mussolini, the “black mark” of fascism might be said to count against him in terms of his reception in the English-speaking academic world. Just as important, however, is the way that he has been seen as an author, quite apart from his politics.

We have already stated that Gadda, from the earliest days of his audience, has been seen primarily as a difficult writer, and this has undoubtedly affected his reception outside Italy. Furthermore, there is some disparity between the fashionable critical practices of Italian and English-speaking academics in general that has caused – admittedly less serious – problems in transmission. One of the major themes of the Italian criticism, in fact, is difficult to grasp for the non-native speaker of Italian: Gadda’s style as a writer.

Much of Gadda criticism to come out of Italy – and almost all of the earliest monographs and articles on his work – focuses on his style of writing.

Gianfranco Contini is the great name in the early part of Gadda’s career, and he

saw analogies between Gadda and the Baroque artists of the 17th century in his tendency towards excess, elaborate descriptions and complexity of line. Initially Gadda appeared offended by this, but later seemed to play up to his name. Certainly, he fascinated his readership by his neologisms, paleo-logisms and difficult' mannerisms'. Of the critics writing in English, only Sbragia has gone into the detail that Italian critics have, throughout the history of writing on Gadda. Partly this is, as we have stated above, due to the difficulty a non-speaker of Italian has in interpreting Gadda's use of language, especially non-standard constructions, but it is also to do with a difference in how texts are approached.

Gadda himself was interested in style, although he was not always interested in the labels that critics attached to his style. While he eventually came to accept the "baroque" tag that Contini had offered, time and aging made him impatient with the intellectual concerns of his readers, whether they tagged him as Baroque, Mannerist or anything else:

Gli arrivano lettere da Firenze di un giovane che doveva laurearsi con una tesi sulla lingua di Gadda [...] Gadda fu urtato dalla definizione di manierista che l'altro intendeva affibbiargli: «Scrivi, scrivi che sono un

manierista. Ho settantacinque anni e sto morendo. Cosa vuoi che me ne importi?»

(Cattaneo 161)

He received letters from a young man in Florence who was writing a dissertation on Gadda's language [...] Gadda was annoyed by the young man's definition of him as a mannerist, which was in fact designed to please him: "Go on, write that I'm a mannerist. I'm seventy-five and dying. Do you want me to care about it?"

His is a varied and difficult style for the casual reader. Sbragia has seen in him a "double vocation as a lyricist and a satirist" which is "responsible for the wide divergence between sublime and comic tonalities in his works." (Sbragia 1997 80) This divergence, while perhaps creating difficulties, lends Gadda's work a depth and range that is seldom found in a single piece of literature.

In our bid to concentrate ourselves on a single piece of literature, however, style is not foremost in our concerns. In fact, while the stylistic approach to Gadda's work has, allied to philological considerations, been pre-eminent up to now in Italy, the truth is that the English-speaking world seems, at least in Gadda's case, less interested in such modes of investigation. As we have said Sbragia's overview from which I have quoted above is almost as far as the investigation

goes in the English-speaking criticism of Gadda's style. Instead, this thesis proposes to take two broad themes and apply them to one of Gadda's novels, the best-known of his works in translation.

Pasticciaccio. The Awful Mess. The game of interpreting Gadda begins here, and – ironically – with little hope for its completion. One of Gadda's earliest and most perceptive critics, Gian Carlo Roscioni almost leads us into despair at the title itself:

Dunque, il *pasticciaccio*. Cioè la negazione, l'impossibilità dell'ordine. Non un dato metafisico o uno schema intellettuale [...] ma semplicemente la constatata, ineliminabile refrattarietà del reale a ogni tentativo di organica, integrale sistemazione.
(Roscioni 1975 74)

So the mess. That is to say, negation, the impossibility of order. Not a metaphysical given or an intellectual plan, but simply a constant, unstoppable refraction of the real from every attempt at an organic, integral ordering.

However, this is a productive despair that characterises one of the great works of literature, a despair that makes the reader interrogate the world. Gadda's use of the image of the tangle, of the fractured, of the undecipherable isn't designed

to produce the kind of despair that paralyses, but instead intends to provoke rage against the world. Gadda, while he has not offered a way out of his *pasticciaccio*, has clearly written in a way that forces us into the position of unravelers, of piecers-together, of codebreakers. In *Quer pasticciaccio*, he does this above all through his choice of genre.

Quer pasticciaccio is a piece of detective fiction, and part of a sub-genre – Italian Crime Fiction – that is increasingly recognised both by academics and the book-buying public. It is also a genre that has successfully straddled the eras of literary modernism and postmodernism. As we will see, while it has its roots in the era of Positivism and its Golden Age in the aftermath of the First World War, detective fiction has come of age as a literary genre – as opposed to a popular one – only with the advent of postmodern literature. The reasons for this are set out neatly in the first pages of Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*:

In the good mystery, there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so, which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing can bear a connection to the outcome of the story,

nothing must be overlooked, everything becomes essence, the centre of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward.

(Auster 6)

While we might hesitate to put Gadda in quite the same postmodern bracket as Paul Auster, surely the attraction to the genre remains the same? Gadda chooses to write a detective novel because in it “everything becomes essence”, everything counts, everything matters. As we shall see, Gadda – like Auster, – does not quite stick to the rules of the genre, making the case even more intriguing.

Whatever the rules broken, wherever the centre strays to, the detective novel makes a demand of the reader: that they *take seriously* the information that has been placed before them. This is also my request to the reader, and my key to reading Gadda, that we should *take seriously* the jokes, references, hints and intertexts that Gadda leaves for us in *Quer pasticciaccio* and his other texts. In doing so, a richer understanding of the art is made possible. *Taking seriously* is part of playing the game of literature. It is more than just suspension of disbelief; it is a “buying into” the world of the text, a surrender to the

possibilities generated by the author on the part of the reader, at whatever level he or she enters into the reading of the text.

In the terms of the task I have set myself, therefore, there are decisions to be made. There is neither the space nor the time available for us to take on the whole of Gadda's text: we must focus our efforts.

Foremost in my mind, as I have already said, was the attempt to bring this study to the largest possible audience. Therefore, while a survey of Manzonian influences on *Quer pasticciaccio* might be a profitable enterprise, it seemed to me better to pick large topics: I have selected two that are part of Gadda's biography, and that are already, in themselves, topics of discussion in literary criticism.

In the first part of the thesis, I will be examining the way that Gadda uses the culture of Catholicism that he was brought up in. I will discuss the historical period into which he was born in terms of the Church, what we know of Gadda's own beliefs and then how Christianity appears in *Quer pasticciaccio*. I will look in detail at where and when references occur, looking particularly at

the location of Due Santi in chapter eight of the novel; I will look at the importance of saints in *QP* and in Gadda's work in general, with some speculation on what might link certain saintly figures to others; I will look at how Rome, the Catholic city *par excellence* is constructed and undermined in terms of its topography; and lastly I will look at the important topic of religious art.

In the second part, it is the turn of science to be taken seriously. I will discuss Gadda's training and career as an electrical engineer, then look at the state of science in Gadda's early life and adulthood, looking in depth at some of the most important ideas of the time. Next I will consider further the idea of genre, and make a case for detective fiction as a field linked to the scientific mindset and bound up with the changes in science. From this, I will look in some depth at the text of *QP*, seeing where the things we have been discussing break into the text. Finally, I will take seriously Ingravallo as a "scientific" philosopher, attempting to follow his reasoning to an unlikely conclusion.

The two-fold division of the work is intended to provoke reflection on the gap between the Divine and the Scientific. With that said, there is also an attempt to

bridge that gap, the last chapter of the first section closing with a reminder of a connection between religious painting and geology, between the appreciation of colour and the appreciation of mine engineering, and the second part opening with a dialogue: an attempt to express a central debate of the Enlightenment using a technique that is both philosophical and dramatic. In this way, these two halves are intended to be seen as interdependent even in their difference. In making such a choice, I have continually kept in mind my goal of *making accessible*: the reader's desire to keep reading is always part of the equation.

Before we reach the main body of the study, I will present over the next few pages some matters that will be of use to the general reader and those less familiar with Gadda and *Quer pasticciaccio*: a condensed biography, a synopsis of the novel and a chapter guide.

The Life of Gadda

When Carlo Emilio Gadda's first commercially successful novel was published in 1957, he was already 64 years old. He was born into a family of rapidly reducing wealth in Milan and his father's death in 1909 made their situation worse. His childhood was split between the city of Milan, where he was born at number 5, via Manzoni, and the small town – village, rather – of Longone al Segrino in Brianza, close to the town of Erba. On his mother's insistence he studied electrical engineering at the Politecnico di Milano and graduated after the First World War, having seen action as a lieutenant in the Alpini, been captured by the Germans and put in prison, and returned home to find that his beloved brother, Enrico, had died. A succession of jobs followed in Italy, Europe and in Argentina, but the challenges of the engineer were not sufficient for his remarkable mind. He quit his last engineering job in 1940 and moved to Florence, where he began to build a reputation as a writer of fantastic ability and unique style.

Not that the younger Gadda had been idle in putting his ideas on paper: Gadda had already published enough of his work to be noticed by critics and literary

figures, and it was their encouragement and financial help that enabled his greatness to flourish. Even if some, such as Carlo Linati – later to become a “caro e gentile amico” (Gadda Conti 77) – were not sure how to take Gadda’s *pasticciaccio* of styles (“spesso l’ingegnere-scrittore inzeppa le sue pagine di troppa terminologia tecnica, da arrivare fino al vaniloquio buffonesco” says Linati in his piece on Gadda entitled “Un Umorista”), his work was met, by and large, with astonished approval. In the literary magazine *Letteratura* he published the first versions of his two greatest novels, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* and, before that, *Cognizione del dolore*, convincing more and more people of his talent.

He moved to Rome, finding a job at RAI (the Italian national broadcaster) thanks in part to the influence of friends in Roman literary circles, and to his burgeoning reputation. It was in Rome that Gadda was to spend the rest of his life, in the unfashionable Monte Mario district, four miles from the city centre. *Quer pasticciaccio*, a novel set in Rome and packed with florid stylings, authentic Roman dialect and colourful language, came out in 1957 and was a surprise commercial hit: there was even a film adaptation directed by Pietro Germi in 1959. Over the next years Gadda’s career was more about the revision and

reworking of the vast numbers of half-finished projects he had amassed over the years.

Since his death in 1973, a number of posthumous publications have been released, including a philosophical treatise, *Meditazione milanese*. The critical edition of his works were overseen by Dante Isella and came out in 1991. Since then, Gadda has become part of the canon of twentieth century Italian literature and reckoned along with Pirandello, Svevo, Calvino and other better-known writers as the best the Italian peninsula has to offer.

A Synopsis of *QP*

Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana is probably the most obviously engaging of Gadda's novels. Set in Rome in 1927 – year V of the Fascist government – it tells the story of two crimes committed in the same apartment building on via Merulana, a long street that runs from the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in the north to the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano and the Aurelian walls in the south. William Weaver, in his introduction to his translation calls via Merulana “quite the dullest street in all of Rome”, and while this might be a little excessive, his point is well made. Indeed, Gadda seems to have chosen the setting deliberately to avoid either the earthy, popular charms of areas such as Trastevere or Testaccio or the relative glamour of via Veneto and the Pincio. It is also a street with little history of its own, although we will see later that it is bordered by places of significant interest.

The first of the two crimes is a burglary – in fact an armed robbery – in the house of a Venetian Countess, Teresa Menegazzi. She is relieved of a number of precious stones and items of jewellery, as well as a significant sum of money. A few days later, a murder is committed: Liliana Balducci, Menegazzi's next door

neighbour, has her throat brutally slashed. Her husband Remo, her maid Assunta Crocchiapani, her cousin Giuliano Valdarena and her sometime “adopted daughter” or “niece” Virginia Troddu are all considered as suspects.

The investigation into both crimes is headed up by Don Ciccio – Francesco Ingravallo – who, in his mid-thirties and therefore in the middle of his life, is the book’s central character. Most of the reader’s sympathy is with Ingravallo, most of the postulating, the theorizing, the imaginings and reimaginings are from inside his head. He is from the Molise, one of the smaller and lesser-known Italian regions, although his narrative is often presented in a muddle of Roman, Neapolitan and Molisian dialect, making him a kind of everyman for the Mezzogiorno. Throughout the novel we come to sympathise and identify with Ingravallo, his irascibility, his temper, his belligerence easily overlooked. To confuse the investigation, Ingravallo was friends with both Remo Balducci and Liliana. The reader is free to infer that Ingravallo was in love with the signora.

Ingravallo’s initial suspicion falls on Valdarena, whom he met at a lunch given at the Balducci’s house for Remo’s birthday. In the meantime, an upstairs neighbour – Commendatore Angeloni – is taken in for questioning regarding

the Menegazzi case. It is believed that he may have used certain delivery boys, allowing them to gain knowledge of the building and thus to perpetrate the crime. At the same time there is the tacit implication that Angeloni is a homosexual, making his silence before the authorities and his inability to explain his relationship with the delivery boys fully more problematic. He is eventually released, as is Valdarena, whose innocence is proven by the testimony of the jeweller Ceccherelli who can confirm that certain effects of Liliana found in Valdarena's rooms were in fact gifts given by the signora.

This leaves the investigating team – Ingravallo works under Doctor Fumi, a Neapolitan, and employs his two favourite detectives, er Biondone and lo Sgranfia – without much to go on in either of the two cases. Following up a enquiry regarding a green scarf – an enquiry resulting from Menegazzi's burglar accidentally dropping a tram ticket stamped at Torraccio (about 20km south east of the city) – Sergeant Pestalozzi of the Marino barracks of the carabinieri comes to police headquarters with news of the scarf and a certain Enea Retalli. At the same time, on a hunch, Fumi calls Ines Cionini, held on suspicion of soliciting, for questioning, seeing that she worked for the same woman – Zamira Pacori – who sent the green scarf to be dyed. During

questioning, Ines reveals the identity of her boyfriend, Diomede Lanciani, his trade (electrician) or rather trades (he is also a gigolo, especially for rich women from out of town or abroad), the fact that he worked on some wiring for Menegazzi and the existence of a younger Lanciani, Ascanio. This fits exactly the *modus operandi* of the burglary, and Pestalozzi is despatched to find the connection between Retalli, Zamira, the Lancianis and the stolen jewels.

Pestalozzi, a motorcyclist, sets out with a Private Cocullo to interrogate Zamira. Arriving at her place of work at Due Santi on via Appia after a downhill journey during which we are told of a strange, erotic dream of the night before, he finds Zamira evasive while not obstructive. The reason for this becomes clear when Camilla Mattonari (one of the seamstresses) comes in and is found to be wearing a ring that matches the description of one in the Menegazzi loot. Pestalozzi takes her to her cousin Lavinia, in whose hovel at Divin Amore is found the remainder of the haul, in a chamberpot under a pile of chestnuts. At the same time, Ascanio is arrested by Biondone in piazza Vittorio.

This part of the mystery being, in some sense, closed, our attention is brought back to the murder of Liliana. Ingravallo has decided that he must interrogate

the servant, Assunta. She is at home, in Pavona, looking after her dying father. Upon seeing her, something seems to snap inside Ingravallo and he accuses her of knowing who killed Liliana, telling her that the police know the identity of the murderer and know that she knows too, and that she must admit this or be considered an accessory to the crime. Assunta, in the final line of dialogue in the novel, stupefies him – and the reader – by declaring, as if in a panic, “Nun son stata io” – “It wasn’t me”. The book closes with Ingravallo forced to think this over, considering whether this amounts to an unexpected admission of guilt.

Chapter by Chapter

Chapter One:

Introduction to Don Ciccio – lunch at the Balducci's house – an armed robbery at 219 via Merulana – interview with Teresa Menegazzi – Ines arrested for soliciting

Chapter Two:

Discovery of Liliana's body – 1st interview with Valdarena – Arrest of Angeloni

Chapter Three:

2nd Interview with Valdarena – digression – Ingravallo goes to Standard Oil

Chapter Four:

Angeloni and Valdarena still held – Remo Balducci returns – reading of the Will – search of Valdarena's apartment – 3rd interview with Valdarena

Chapter Five:

Ceccherelli the Jeweller – interview with Balducci – funeral – interview with Don Corpi – story of the maids and "nieces"

Chapter Six:

Pestalozzi enters – 1st interview with Ines – introduction of Zamira & Due Santi

Chapter Seven:

2nd interview with Ines – introduction of Diomede Lanciani – the robbery understood

Chapter Eight:

Focus on Pestalozzi & Due Santi – Pestalozzi's dream – Zamira – arrest of Camilla Mattonari

Chapter Nine:

Arrest of Lavinia Mattonari – discovery of the jewels – horse and carriage ride

Chapter Ten:

Arrest of Ascanio Lanciani – Ingravallo leaves Rome – confrontation with Assunta

Part One: Catholic Gadda

1: The Case for a Catholic Gadda

In this chapter I will discuss the parts of Gadda's biography that relate to his religious experience. We will see while, in matters of orthodoxy, the adjective "Catholic" cannot in all seriousness be applied to him, we must still ask to what extent matters of religion concerned him and consider him in the light of the culture that he lived in. To this latter end, it will be necessary to review briefly the state of the religion at the time that Gadda was forming his opinions on the world.

1: 1 According to Gadda

Despite the title I have given this part of the thesis, Carlo Emilio Gadda should not be regarded as a man to whom the adjective "religious" can be applied. That we should even think of him in any sense as a "Catholic" is *prima facie* a mistake. His childhood, so far as we can make it out, was marked, certainly, by at least a kind of religious education and experience of the rituals and services of the Catholic Church: a situation that in the Italy of the time could be described with the adjective "normal". His baptism, confirmation and first communion, as well as the attendance at Mass were part of his early life, and for his parents, an

important part. In an interview of 1972, Clara Ambrosini, his sister, refers to religious practice as “la tradizione di famiglia” and that “andavamo tutti a messa [...] nella chiesa di San Simpliciano” (PF 225) [we would all go together to Mass, at the church of Saint Simplician]. This basilica, San Simpliciano, is in the centre of Milan, in a piazzale just off via Brera. It has been a part of Milan since Ambrosinian times, bearing the name of Ambrose’s successor to the Bishopric. It was built on land that was already associated with the mysteries and rituals of life and death, a pagan cemetery. The story of its history and its position, both in Milan and in the life of Carlo Emilio Gadda, is suggestive and one that we will see repeated in its essential features again and again as we investigate where and how Christianity appears in Gadda’s works.

The basilica of San Simpliciano is not just where the Gadda family attended mass, but also where Gadda was baptised and confirmed in the Church, is an apt place to begin our survey.¹ Gadda’s response to religion is neatly mirrored by the history of the building, with its pre-Christian origins, ancient foundations, mediaeval adaptation and baroque reworking. Gadda’s sense of religious practice, ritual and text come from the classical world, and his interest

¹ It is also the church closest to where the family made its home after leaving via Manzoni. See Gadda Conti’s account in *Le confessioni di Carlo Emilio Gadda*, (Milan: PAN, 1974) page 9, and Luca Verdone, “Un ingegnere del linguaggio,” (Italy: RAI, 1994) ed. Marco Tesi.

in the original texts, the cult of saints and religious art are obvious to those who look for such clues in his work. These are topics that I will examine in the following pages.

It is worth us looking at what the writer had to say about the Christian Church. Although there is not much to tell under this heading – Gadda made little or no connection with the Church itself after his adolescence – at the same time, he recognised the importance of Christianity and the existence of something beyond everyday experience. In an interview published as “Carlo Emilio Gadda come uomo” in May 1968, Gadda speaks firstly of his family as “di tipo lombardo, cattolico” (PF 155) then of his own religious feeling lasting “fino alla pubertà”. He retains, however, what he calls a sense of the religious, a religious feeling:

Cosa intende per senso di religiosità?

Il sentimento di qualcosa di superiore, che sta sopra di noi, anche in questo momento della nostra cultura. Questo io l’ho sempre avuto e ce l’ho ancora.

Il sentimento dell’esistenza di Dio?

Se si può chiamare Dio il complesso meccanismo del mondo... quello che a noi appare ... la scienza insomma.

(PF 161)

What do you mean by religious feeling?

The feeling that there is something superior, something above us, even in today's culture. I have always had that feeling and I have it now.

The feeling that God exists?

If one can name the complex mechanism of the world 'God'... that which appears to us... science, in short.

Gadda goes on in this interview to invert Laplace's famous remark explaining why God had not figured in his scientific discourses by stating "La scienza è un'ipotesi di cui Dio può fare a meno" (PF 155). He makes the telling suggestion that the rationalism of the 19th century and his Catholic upbringing make such a resolution of these two great forces in a kind of deism or pantheism necessary. Gadda recognises here and in other interviews recorded in the volume *Per favore mi lasci nell'ombra*, the importance that the Catholic form of Christianity had for him personally: naturally, we can conjecture that in his writing he used his cultural knowledge – and this applies equally to what we will later say about science, or what we could say about Greek or Latin literature – as a tool to create his literature.² That is to say that Gadda consciously chose religious imagery, intertexts and lateral references to encode his meaning in his texts, a fact I hope

² Even his insistence on a kind of "god as science" in the later *Eros e Priapo* appears tinged with a conception of the Christian god: he invokes "Calvary" and talks about "subjugating the Ego to god" (EP SGF II 374) as part of the living of a good life, in opposition to the "narcissistic" Mussolini.

to demonstrate to my reader in the following chapters. But before we deal with the literature, it is worth asking what it meant to be a Catholic in Gadda's Italy.

1: 2 The Catholic Church in Gadda's Youth: Modernism and Salesians

Any attempt to analyse the philosophical and theological state of the Catholic Church around the turn of the 20th century and up to the First World War should begin with the Encyclical of Pope Pius X that was promulgated on the 8th of September 1907. This letter, entitled *Pascendi dominici gregis*, attacked a Catholic Modernist movement that had gained ground in France, Northern Italy and England. By this, along with a document (*Lamentabili sane exitu*) published earlier that year, the Pope hoped to stamp out the trend before it had time to infect his flock. Catholic Modernism had its roots in the Protestant exegesis movement of the 19th century, with writers and scholars like David Strauss, whose book *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (1836) (*The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, translated by George Eliot in 1860) was the first in a series of attempts to find a "Historical Jesus"³. This quest found favour in a post-Hegelian world in which it was possible to read the New Testament critically,

³ The heirs of this movement today include Dominic Crossan who has written books such as *The Cross that Spoke* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1988) and *The Historical Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) which contain useful background information for this section.

historiographically.⁴ An explosion of interest in the life of Jesus began that continues to this day, both in terms of scientific discussion and in fantastic speculation.

From the idea that the historicity of the Bible could be challenged emerged a new way of thinking about Catholicism. In Italy, Ernesto Buonaiuti (1881-1946) ran a magazine called *Ricerche religiose* and wrote books such as *Il programma dei modernisti* (1908) and *Lettere di un prete modernista* (1908). Such activity eventually saw him excommunicated, although he continued to write and work. He held the position of professor in History of Christianity at the University of Rome from 1925 to 1931, leaving the chair because he would not take the oath of loyalty to the Fascist government. His influence outlasted the Modernist movement, and he published a huge number of articles, books and papers, especially on the 13th century mystic Gioacchino da Fiore (Joachim of Fiore), a heretical but hugely popular figure in the mediaeval church, but also popular histories of Christianity and religious figures: a copy of his *San Girolamo* ended up in Gadda's library.⁵ Perhaps it was the influence of Buonaiuti and others

⁴ Strauss had been due to be taught by Hegel at Berlin, but the great man died as Strauss arrived.

⁵ A second edition, published in 1919. This was part of a series, costing L. 5 a volume and published by Formaggini in Rome, of "Profili" of the lives of important and famous men. Buonaiuti also wrote *Sant'Agostino* for the same series.

sympathetic to him that saw the reforms in the way that Sacred Scripture was handled after the Second Vatican Council. In any case Buonaiuti was an important and controversial figure in the period before and immediately after the First World War.

Modernism, while an important movement in the history of the Church in the twentieth century, was more of a concern for the intellectuals and the theologians than it was for the man-in-the-street. That said, Gadda was more likely as an adult to come into contact with the vestiges of Modernism than were most believing Christians. An example of this can be found in a book that was in Gadda's possession, Laberthonnière's *Il realismo cristiano e l'idealismo greco*. The first two sentences of the introduction to this volume run: "Presentando ai lettori italiani quest'opera del Laberthonnière non vogliamo ricondurre gli spiriti alla considerazione delle esigenze sentimentali dalle quali nacque il *modernismo*. Per noi il modernismo è ben morto" (Laberthonnière 11). [In presenting this work to Italian readers, we are not trying to conduct the spirit of the sentimental demands from which Modernism was born. For us, Modernism is quite dead.] Pietro Gobetti, the translator and author of the introduction – he was also an expert on the theological history of the Church from the 1860s

onwards – sees a distinction between the Italian Modernism and that which took root in France, the later being more based in philosophy. Laberthonnière, he contests, is a Christian mystic after Kant (Laberthonnière 13): an enticing description, and perhaps one that would have attracted Gadda.

The grass roots Church was undergoing something less like a revolution, but the changes in the relationships between the laity, the clergy and the education system would arguably bear more fruit in the long run. This is the age of Don Giovanni Bosco and the Salesian Society, a movement that had its roots in the days before the Risorgimento with the “Oratorio”, an idea still relevant to today’s Italy. In fact, Don Bosco was continuing a tradition from as far back as San Filippo Neri’s prayer-based youth work in the 1550s. Still, the semi-institutionalized oratori of the Salesians saw a great change in individual parishes in the years around the turn of the century, linking young people together in a Catholic institution on a local basis. In Gadda’s Longone al Segrino for example, a priest and teacher (*catechista*), Giacomo Baldoni, is remembered by a marble plaque in the parish church. Gadda himself was sufficiently interested in the “Umanitaria” – the Società Umanitaria, a charitable operation based in Milan – to make it a central pivot in *La meccanica*.

In fact, both these different pressures had a stimulating effect on the Catholic faith in Italy at the time, as it was entering arguably its most politically powerful period in the modern era. The strong rebuttal that the Modernists were dealt by Pius X and the unifying effects of local organization of young people meant that Catholics in Italy were now perhaps more of a coherent group with similar outlook than was the case among churches in other countries and other social groups within Italy. The separation of the Church from the parties of the Left, an example we can still appreciate today, is difficult to comprehend in Scotland, for instance, where Christian ideals were at this time central to the birth and growth of the Labour movement and where even today, a Catholic upbringing is an indicator of support for left wing politics.

Gadda's short pseudo-autobiographical account in *Villa in Brianza* uses the character of Francesco Pelegatta to personify the concerns of the middle-class

Lombard Catholic:

Da giovane aveva viaggiato, per ragioni di studio e di lavoro: non aveva imparato quasi niente, ma insomma era stato ad Elberfeld, a Lione, a Londra. Conosceva "le lingue", era «negoziante de seda». Aveva perduto tutta la sua sostanza, il suo incubo erano «i framassoni»; [...] non aveva un soldo; credeva in Dio, negli Apostoli tutti e nella Santa Chiesa Madre di tutti li uomini, ma non aveva il

becco d'un quattrino. Mentre le due cose, cioè i ruspi e la Fede, sono notoriamente conciliabilissime.
(VB 4)

As a young man he had travelled for study and for work: he hadn't learned hardly anything, but had been in Elberfield, in Lyon, in London. He knew "languages", we has a "silk trader". He had lost all his money, his great nightmare were "the freemasons"; [...] He hadn't a penny. He believed in God, in all the Apostles and in the Holy Church, Mother of all men, but he didn't have a thrupenny bit. While one would think that these two things, Faith and Cash, aren't exactly irreconcilable.

This caricature of a close-minded and inept father figure might raise a smile, but obviously a kernel of truth is to be found in it. Gadda's upbringing in Brianza meant that he was expected to share in the family's religious devotion. According to his sister Clara, this continued up until the age of about 15. In Longone there is an oratory – not fully a church, but a place of prayer – while the local parish church is but a few minutes walk away, in Eupilio.

The church in Epilio is dedicated to Saint George, of whom we will speak later. Represented in the art works connected to the church are Saint Antony, Saint Joseph and Saint Christopher:⁶ the only male saints traditionally depicted with the Christchild. We will have cause to return to these saints in chapter 3 and it

⁶ The representation of Saint Christopher is on the door of the church, along with Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. These are relatively new, from the 1960s, and although the Parish Priest believed that they replaced doors featuring the same subjects, I have been unable to find photographic evidence of this.

is worth considering whether the young Gadda may have been particularly impressed at a young age by these figures.

2: The Catholic References in *QP*

In *Quer pasticciaccio*, there are numerous and diverse references to the rituals, practices and texts of Catholic Christianity. In examining these references, I have decided to exclude for the present imprecations or exclamations of holy words or names, except on the occasions that I have felt the usage particularly marked.⁷ In addition, I have chosen not to draw overmuch attention to themes and subjects I will be tackling in detail in the subsequent chapters of this work, so here is not the place to record references to saints and churches.

With that said, we can begin to make some general remarks regarding the frequency of the references. It is clear that, as is generally the case with important themes in Gadda's writing, the placing of these references is done carefully and with artistic intent foremost in the mind of the author.

2: 1 Analysis of References

To aid analysis of these references, I have subdivided them into five different categories, naming them ritual, saints, dates, texts – whether Biblical or liturgical – and tradition. The “ritual” (1) subdivision is for references relating

⁷ An example of this might be “Mària Vergine!” as exclaimed by Contessa Teresa Menegazzi. This instance is doubly marked as the choice of the Blessed Virgin is important to the character of Menegazzi and the pronunciation reveals her to be a native of Venice.

to the sacraments and offices of the Christian faith. "Saints" (2) are, obviously enough, references to saints, but also to their churches where I have noted these. "Dates" (3) is for the numerous times that Gadda uses the church calendar in describing the passage of time, "Texts" (4) for Biblical and Liturgical quotations or pseudo-quotations and "Tradition" (5) is a slightly more general category, dealing with Church history, practices and superstitions that do not have the status of ritual, common beliefs and – importantly for this book – satirical references to these. Clearly, a reference can fit into more than one of these categories: the first reference, to Sant'Eleuterio, is clearly to both a saint (as Gadda intends that we notice the name) and a date, and so counts in both categories for the purposes of this analysis.

Starting with chapter one, we see seventeen references (counting the multiple names, times and places offered in the description of Angeloni: throughout I have tried to distil multiple references like this to one single complex reference) to Christian religious practice. This is the most fertile chapter, and only chapter five comes close, with sixteen references, making for an average of 7.9 references per chapter. This number falls to 5.75 per chapter if these two particularly heavy chapters are discounted.

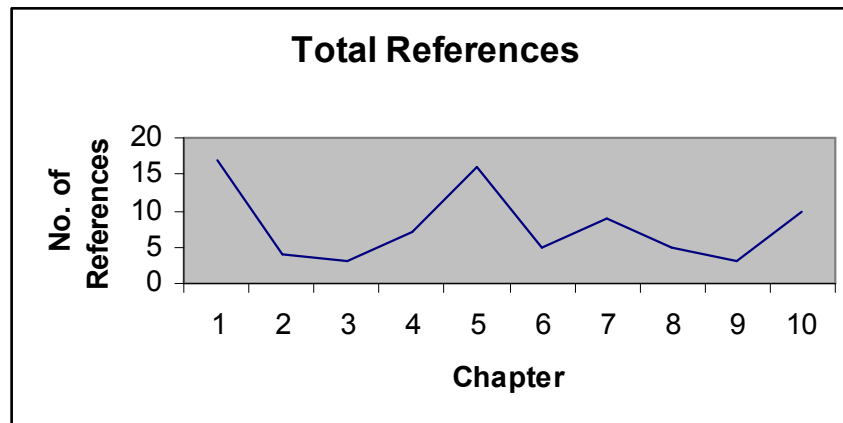


Figure 1: Total References to Christianity

The graph shows to what extent Gadda has sought to place his Christian references in a regular way, with the largest peaks being at the beginning, middle and final chapters of the novel. When we consider the narrative function of the first and fifth chapters especially, we will see that the references are primarily used when new characters are introduced and scene-setting is closer to the intention of the author than action.

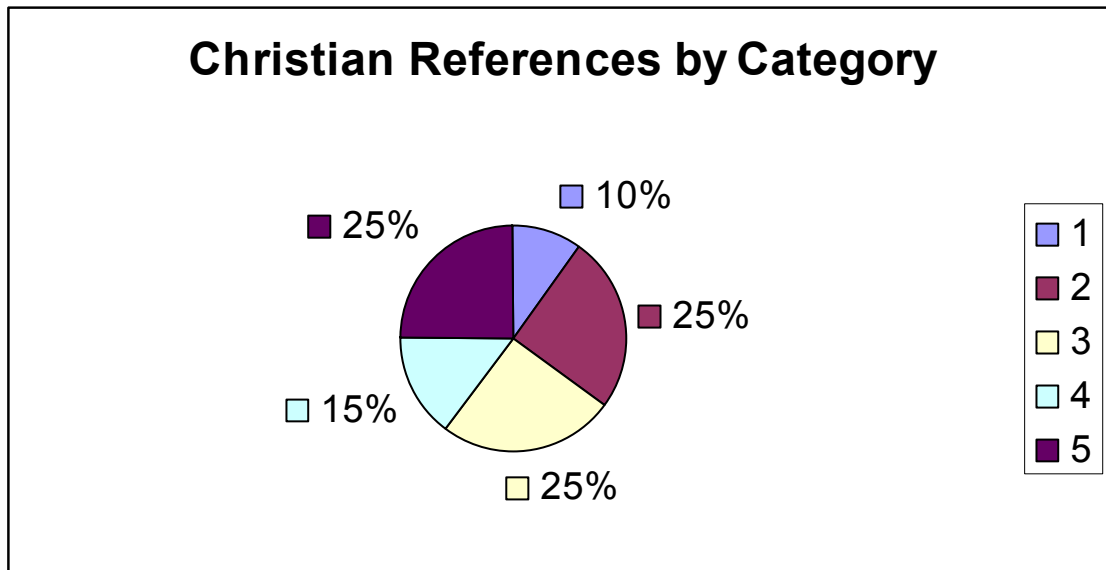


Figure 2: Christian References by Chapter

1: Ritual; 2: Saints; 3: Dates; 4: Texts; 5: Tradition.

In this graph, we see the importance of Saints (and Churches) and of dates to Gadda's use of Christian imagery. In fact, almost the whole of the timeframe and topography of the novel is phrased in these terms, especially in the first and last chapters.

There is reason to this distribution. The chapters with the lowest incidence of religious references are the most eventful – chapter two – and the two that are set outside of the city of Rome – chapters eight and nine. The relative absence of references to Christianity in the eighth and ninth chapters is particularly

interesting, as we will see when we discuss the setting in the second part of this chapter.

For the moment, we might profitably describe some of the salient features and connections made in this catalogue of references. There are a number of themes that run through the novel that are much easier to identify when they are collected in this manner.

One of the key ways in which time is measured in the novel is, as I have asserted above in my categorisation, is through the use of religious imagery.⁸ In the very first pages of the novel we are introduced to this by the association of the date of 20th of February with a saint's day – that of Sant'Eleuterio. The most famous Saint Eleuterus⁹ was Bishop of Rome in the 2nd century, but the reference here is probably, as Ingravallo suggests, to the meaning of his name: it means *free* in Greek, offered as a contrast to the lack of freedom – again according to Ingravallo – offered under fascism (QP RR II 18). Apart from also introducing the first of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church to us – we will meet each of them in the course of the novel– the reference to the saint's feast is the

⁸ Cfr Amigoni's *La più semplice macchina* (1995)

⁹ Although the feastday of the 20th of February belongs to Saint Eleutherius of Tournai (d. c.532), the first bishop of the French city.

first of many that will take us through the calendar. This is reinforced by the memory of Ingravallo's saint's day a few lines below, then the reference to Candlemas – the second of February – a few pages later. There is a choice here to describe the passing of time in Rome in a particular style, and the narrator's awareness of this choice is underlined by his reference to "le efemeridi" giving way to the "calendari della Chiesa" (QP RR II 20).

This continues throughout the chapters of the novel. Even the hours of the day in the crucial police operations of the last chapter are punctuated by the bells of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. Even time passing in a figurative sense and in exaggerated ways is expressed by reference to the Church's calendar: the hen that only lays once a year (at Pentecost -RR II 150) or the promotion that "in più d'un caso ci arriva insieme l'Olio Santo" (QP RR II 191) are examples of this.

The "Olio Santo" is the oil used for the Sacrament of the Sick, the last of the Church's seven sacraments. Each of these appears in some form in the novel and together they are associated with the Seven Virtues in the very existence of the city of Rome: "Pe dì che l'Urbe incarnava omai senza er minimo dubbio la città de li sette candelabri de le sette virtù" (QP RR II 73). Baptism is one of the

things that link the fated couple of Liliana and Remo Balducci to via Merulana: he was baptized in San Martino ai Monti, close to the thoroughfare. The sanctity of the Confessional is invoked by Don Corpi so that he cannot talk completely freely with Ingravallo, even although it is clear that Liliana regularly received the sacrament.

Don Corpi is considered by Ingravallo in terms of his “*δγναμις*” – a word borrowed from the New Testament, where is used to refer to the “signs” or “miracles” that Jesus works – of fatherhood, despite the fact that Holy Orders and Marriage are the only two sacraments that are incompatible, both involving an ontological change in the recipient (QP RR II 22). It is interesting also that Assuntina is worried by the fact that the priest may not arrive in time to offer the sacrament of the sick to her dying father at the end of the novel: “Er prete nun po esse qua prima dell’una, m’ha fatto di. Ah, poveretti noi!” (QP RR II 275) This concern is made perhaps the more poignant because of the identification that is tacitly made between the policeman and the priest: Ingravallo borrows for the only time in the novel the spiritual “charity” and “prudence” that are associated in other places with the character of Don Corpi (see RR II 22, 129, 131, 143, and the place it is finally applied to Ingravallo: RR II

272). In this crucial moment, a deeper truth of the novel is revealed, that the Assuntinas, Ineses and Diomedes of the story are to a greater or lesser extent dependent upon and oppressed before the twin organizing forces of the police and the Church.

2: 2 I Due Santi

We have seen that Gadda understands the rituals, practices and the traditions of Christianity as well as knowing a great deal about Church history. We will see in the following chapter how much he knew of the lives of the saints, but his use of the names and feast days of the saints suggests an in-depth knowledge of the custom to us already. What we have not yet seen in our analysis to any great extent in *Quer pasticciaccio* is knowledge of the central Christian text, the Bible. While the Good Book's importance to the Catholic tradition of the twentieth century is of an order of magnitude less than its importance to many protestant groups of the Anglo-Saxon world, the text still has an important role to play in worship and tradition. So what use does Gadda, our educated non-believer, make of it?

A possible case study for the significance that Gadda gives to Biblical intertext and the use he makes of it is the Due Santi episode in the eighth chapter of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. In this section I will introduce and analyse this scene in close detail, explaining its significance in the novel and showing how it supports my contention that Gadda was well aware of the power of the Bible as a source of meaning for his readers: it enriches his art.

Due Santi is actually a very small settlement on the via Appia, approximately 20 kilometres from Rome, and about 10 from Marino. There is precious little to see there now: the confluence of two asphalted roads, a bar that resembles – to some extent – the hovel described as Zamira’s Place in the novel, a small altar, and the entrances to a couple of grand estates, in one of which is situated a great house, now divided into flats. The other is marked by an impressive gateway – described below – in a state of significant disrepair, and inaccessible to the public. One feels that, despite the increase in speeding cars, it is much the same place as Gadda describes in Chapter Eight, a curiously lonely, desolate outpost of the città eterna. As for the Due Santi and its surrounding area at the time the novel is set in, a reproduction of a map from 1927 shows its status of “trasformazione fondaria dell’agro romano” (Cassetti: 2005, 291). It shows that

the area around the Frattocchie was not considered in any sense built up, not even as a suburb. It lists the area as either “appoderamenti spontanei già eseguiti” or “zona nella quale sono stati modificati i piani di bonifica obbligatoria”. Other near-contemporary sources barely mention the area (cf Lanciani 1909), and while the via Appia is discussed at length in Mammucari’s studies on the amateurs of the Grand Tour, there is no mention of the settlement at all (Mammucari 1997 & 1999). The large, impressive archway is described in the *Atlante del barocco in Italia* (vol. 1) as follows:

Portale di villa a due santi

Il portale, situato alla convergenza dell’Appia con una diramazione per Marino in località Spinabella, si offre come terminazione monumentale, affacciata sulla via consolare, di un rettilineo interno che conduce a una villa non più esistente. Il fornice emerge da un paramento murario più basso, al quale è raccordato da volute. La recinzione ha una cornice allineata all’imposta dell’arco ed è aperta ai due lati da finestre dalla mostra quadrata con risalto centrale. L’arco è inquadrato da parastre triplici che sorreggono due tratti di frontone arcato spezzato; al loro interno si trova un fastigio a edicola con volute minori e un frontespizio triangolare anch’esso spezzato. Il gioco di incastri tra elementi maggiori e minori dai frontespizi inconclusi avvicina il portale ai modi di Rainaldi.

(Azzaro et al. 167)

The setting is, then, a blank canvas, albeit one already framed ahead of time by this fairly impressive structure and the habitations nearby. That said, this archway is indicative of what is not there, its very presence is representative of

what is missing. The point is that Gadda felt free to make what use of it he could, and has created a memorable tableau for the reader. We must, however, keep in mind that we are dealing with as many as three different historical periods when we bring in such a place as Due Santi: the present, with the recently re-surfaced road leading into Rome; the late 1940s and 1950s when Gadda was writing and re-writing this passage (and the era in which the altar to Our Lady was erected by the roadside); and 1927, the setting of the tale, when the *tramvie* ferried people in and out of the city, providing an important economic boost to the area (Cairati) and, indeed, making possible the connection between Rome and hinterland so important for the novel. Given the lack of data and photographs to be found in local libraries, it is necessary to take what information is on offer from books of local history.¹⁰

¹⁰ I have found the following books useful in this study: Roberto Casetti, *Roma e Lazio 1870-1945. La costruzione della capitale e della sua regione* (Rome: Gangemi, 2005), Rodolfo Lanciani, *Wanderings in the Roman campagna* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), Renato Mammucari, *Viaggio a Roma e nella sua campagna : pittori e letterati alla scoperta del paesaggio e alla ricerca delle magiche atmosfere di un mondo perduto dalla mitica stagione del Grand Tour agli inizi del nostro secolo* (Rome: Newton & Compton, 1997), Renato Mammucari and Rigel Langella, *I pittori della mal'aria* (Rome: Newton & Compton, 1999), Giorgio Muratore, *Roma : guida all'architettura* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2007), Claudio Rendina, *La grande enciclopedia di Roma : personaggi, curiosità, monumenti, storia, arte e folclore della Città Eterna dalle origini al Duemila*. (Rome: Newton & Compton, 2000), Claudio Rendina, *Guida insolita ai misteri, ai segreti, alle leggende e alle curiosità del Lazio*, (Rome: Newton & Compton, 2001).

Before the novel makes its way to Due Santi in chapter eight, there are numerous allusions to it and to its most notable resident, Zamira. In a certain sense, the novel has been building towards this place as the point of resolution for several of its subplots: this is where the scarf that Retalli wore is traced to; this is where Ines fled from to seek her fortune in Rome; this is the link between the polizia and the carabinieri, who we are told fight like “gatti e cani”, the police smirking about the relationship that several of Marino’s carabinieri are alleged to have had with Zamira’s establishment, and it is precisely Ines’ revelatory evidence that makes Pestalozzi uncomfortable in the police headquarters.

Il Pestalozzi avrebbe voluto, e soprattutto dovuto, protestare. [...] [Ma] si contentò, ne’ momenti critici, d’una alzata di spalle e d’una scrollatina del capo: “storie! storie!” Tutti ci credevano, però. La questura si ciba appunto di storie: in concorrenza coi carabinieri. Ognuna delle due organizzazioni vorrebbe monopolizzare le storie, anzi addirittura la Storia. Ma la storia è una sola! Be’, sono capaci di spaccarla in due [.]
(QP RR II 146)

Pestalozzi would have liked and, above all, *should* have tried, to protest. [...] [But] he contented himself, at critical moments, with a shrug and a shake of his head: “Nonsense! All lies!”. But they all believed it, nevertheless. The police dote on nonsense: in their rivalry with the carabinieri. Each of the two organizations would like to have a monopoly on such stories, on History indeed. But History is one alone! Well, they’re capable of hacking it in two [.]
(AM 198)

Pestalozzi is the agent charged with visiting the workshop of this Zamira Pàcori, and he takes with him the somewhat slow and ponderous Cocullo, a junior colleague. Descended from the motorbike, Pestalozzi fiddles with the engine, allowing us a moment in the company of Cocullo as he examines a fresco representing the two saints of the village. Let us look at the texts that Gadda gives Cocullo to read from St. Jerome's Vulgate. Notice how Gadda forces us to pause especially over the Latin quotations, with the stuttering of the ill-schooled private drawing attention to the words used.¹¹

Sotto alle figure dei due, nei due cartigli ondegianti l'un su l'altro in esergo, il tombolotto di Farafiliopetri prevenne a leggere, col dischiudere e richiudere i labbri mutamente, spiccicandoli a pena senza dar parola di fuori: "Crescìte ve-ro in gratia et in co... co... cococcione Dòmini Preti Sec Ep." ... "Saepe," così lesse il Farafilio, "proposùì venire ad vos et pro-hi-bìtus" (così mentalmente) "sum usque ad kuc Paul ad Rom."
(QP RR II 199)

Beneath the figures of the two men, in the two waving scrolls one upon the other in exergue, the tubby Farafiliopetri managed to read, in silent parting and closing of the lips, barely forming the words without uttering them: "Crescite ve-ro in gratia et in co...co...coccione Domine Preti Sec Ep." ... "Saepe," The Farafilio read on, "proposui venire ad vos et prohibitus" (still mentally) "sum usque ad kuk Paul ad Rom."
(AM 275-6)

¹¹ We may also note, as Pedriali points out, that the line is "de-scrambled in a footnote, and thus actually, like the other line, stated twice" Federica G. Pedriali, "Cain and other symmetries (the early alternatives)," *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* 2007.6 (2007).

Let us look at what happens when we extend the text a sentence or so beyond that which is given here by Gadda. The context becomes clearer and our reading of the texts is shifted quite radically:

¹⁵ Think of our Lord's patience as your opportunity to be saved; our brother Paul, who is so dear to us, told you this when he wrote to you with the wisdom that he was given. ¹⁶ He makes this point too in his letters as a whole wherever he touches on these things. In all his letters there are of course some passages which are hard to understand, and these are the ones that uneducated and unbalanced people distort, in the same way. ¹⁷ Since you have been forewarned about this, my dear friends, be careful that you do not come to the point of losing the firm ground that you are standing on, carried away by the errors of unprincipled people. ¹⁸ *Instead, continue to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* To him be glory, in time and eternity. Amen.
(2 Peter 3:15-18)

¹³ I want you to be quite certain too, brothers, that *I have often planned to visit you - though up to the present I have always been prevented* - in the hope that I might work as fruitfully among you as I have among the gentiles elsewhere. ¹⁴ I have an obligation to Greeks as well as barbarians, to the educated as well as the ignorant, ¹⁵ and hence the eagerness on my part to preach the gospel to you in Rome too.
(Romans 1:13-15)

Rather than the sanitized vision of the two saints walking together down the road, we see more of the real story of these two brothers in Christ. In the first passage, Peter, while not openly hostile, is clearly uncomfortable with Paul's approach to what was not yet for him a new religion. On the other hand, Paul is disappointed by Peter's refusal to allow him to preach in person to the Jewish

population of Rome, an orbit of influence controlled by Peter and James. Gadda was unmistakably aware of this underlying tension,¹² and has brought out the only two passages in the letters of the New Testament that bear witness to it. In his possession, and now in the Fondo Gadda of the Burcardo, were a number of books giving fuller accounts of this important disagreement in the history of Christianity. Furthermore, Gadda has perhaps hidden another clue to his intentions in the novel. The saints of Due Santi are not in fact saints Peter and Paul, but Cyril and Methodius, two saints that were commemorated in the locality by a basilica, since demolished, and gone even by the time of the novel's setting. These two brothers were associated by their work together on the translation of the Bible into the Slavic languages of Eastern Europe, rather than founder members of the Christian religion.¹³ The bar that stands at the fork in the road overlooked by our baroque gateway – and the closest thing to Zamira's workshop that Due Santi currently has – has photographs of a mosaic preserved from the demolition of the church, and the few inhabitants of the area who I was able to speak to seemed to be quite aware that the "two saints" of the place were

¹² Although the passage is not marked in his copy, this incident is commented on by Salvatorelli and Hühn in *La Bibbia*, a commentary on the Bible that was in Gadda's possession. L. & Hühn Salvatorelli, E., *La Bibbia* (Florence: Sandon, 1915) 430-1 & 90-2.

¹³ Cyril's name is the origin of the word "Cyrillic", as in the Slavic alphabet. The alphabet was invented by Cyril and Methodius' followers, especially Constantine The Philosopher. (See Papal Letter *Industriae tuae* (880))

not Peter and Paul, even if few were able to name, unprompted, Cyril and Methodius.¹⁴ It is difficult to say with any certainty whether Gadda could have known this: by the time he visited Rome in 1930 the basilica had already been demolished. However, Gadda's first trip to Due Santi – if we conjecture a visit at the time the novel is set – would have been much easier using public transportation than it is now, so it is possible to believe that he did have access to this information. If he was – and it is worth pointing out the text itself does not offer us many reasons for suspicion – it puts more emphasis on the reading of the quotations from Peter and Paul, making these still more important, because if they have been made up wholesale by the author, their significance is reinforced.

Overall, these might not seem like particularly revealing pieces of information: after all, we are dealing with a minor incident, and a place – though important in the novel – small enough to be overlooked by cartographers and historians for generations. What is interesting, however, is that the incident exists at all, that the place is mentioned, and that Gadda has gone out of his way to provide us with material to chew over.

¹⁴ Interestingly, no-one that I had spoken to knew that Due Santi was an important place in Gadda's *QP*, even those who had heard of it. One man cheerfully admitted that he had never read as far as chapter 8.

3: Gadda's Saints

This chapter takes the interesting figures of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Christopher and Saint George and examines Gadda's use of them in his writing. We will visit the biographies – real and otherwise – of these saints and then see where they fall into Gadda's texts. In so doing, we will be able to examine the symbolism involved and begin to ask questions of Gadda's own involvement in his texts, touching on psychoanalysis and the question of the writer's attitude towards the feminine and his own sexuality.

Saints, of course, are a particular feature of the Christian church, and the belief in the powers of saints to intercede on behalf of one of the faithful is a definitive one in Catholicism.¹⁵ The status of certain saints is guaranteed by the Roman Calendar – which we have already seen evidence of the previous chapter – giving them a day on which their feast is celebrated. These saints are partly chosen on the basis of tradition, but also because their stories are exemplary: the narrative of the life of the saint is an essential feature in their cult. While

¹⁵ Cfr James F. Hopgood, *The Making of Saints: Contesting Sacred Ground* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005) and Richard Kieckhefer and George Doherty Bond, *Sainthood : its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1988). Of course, within the Catholic version of the Christian tradition the intercessor *par excellence* is Mary, Jesus' mother. This chapter will not consider her, but she is a figure to whom I would like to return in a future and more in-depth study on Gadda, as her importance is undeniable in his work.

sainthood was originally proclaimed *vox populi*, now there is a more structured process involving papal authority. A declaration of sainthood, or canonisation, essentially amounts to the declaration that the person in question is in Heaven, and therefore in a position to intercede on the behalf of the believer. The saints that we visit in this chapter are three of the most famous in all of Christianity, but they come from quite different worlds of history, myth and legend.

3: 1 St Francis of Assisi

In this section I will elucidate the figure of St Francis of Assisi, one of the saints whose name is most often used by Gadda, whose figure appears most frequently. This should not surprise us particularly: St Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of Italy, and even prior to this status being confirmed by Pope Pius XII in 1939,¹⁶ the saint had long been revered by Italians, and not only by especially religious Italians or for specifically religious reasons. A number of histories of the Italian language, to give one example, place Francis at the very beginning of the history of Italian literature, making him the first of Italian poets.¹⁷ In religious circles, Francis' influence is so important that the very practice of Catholicism in Italy is shaped by it. He was canonized just twenty-

¹⁶ Along with Saint Catherine of Siena. "Licet Commissa", AAS XXXI (1939), 256-7.

¹⁷ See, for example, Gianfranco Contini, *Letteratura italiana delle origini* (Florence: Sansoni, 1970).

two months after his death on the 3rd of October 1226, and building work began on a basilica that still stands in Assisi began instantly he was pronounced a saint. Pope Gregory IX himself laid the foundation stone for the basilica on the 16th of July, 1226. The devotion that the Italian people had to this saint is shown by the number of people who bear some form of his name.¹⁸ Included among these is, of course Carlo Emilio's father, perhaps going some way to explaining the curious obsession that the author shows in regards to the saint.¹⁹

It is interesting how Francis managed to make this move from being the son of a cloth merchant to being a figure demanding the devotion of a pope in just 44 short years.²⁰ Francis' fame is partly due to his religious example, and partly due to excellent PR. Francis had the very good fortune to have such writers as Bonaventure and Leo in his order: they, along with his own letters and religious writings provided and provide a way for those who never met Francis to get to

¹⁸ A long-standing trend that is continuing: in 2008 "Francesco" was the most popular name for baby boys, and "Francesca" was ninth most popular for girls. (ISTAT, 2009)

¹⁹ That Francesco Gadda was also, among other things, a "negoziante di seta" (*Villa in Brianza*, 6), should be noted in this regard.

²⁰ Or possibly 45 years. The year of Francis' birth is given variously as 1181 and 1182.

know him. This kind of contact at a distance is unheard of in any Christian figure before Francis and for a long time after.²¹

This is perhaps not the place to speak of mediaeval spin doctors, but having something, not just of his deeds but of his personality explained to far more people than he could ever have met in person certainly plays a large part in the success of Francis' ministry. This means, of course, that Francis comes down to us in the present as a remarkably complete character. Complete and complex, for all the attempts to claim him as part of a mainstream of Christianity. Francis was a reformer, a renegade. He was even sometimes contrary and downright bizarre. This status as a confident outsider has proven attractive to a great variety of followers throughout the centuries, and perhaps the young Gadda would have been struck, like others are, by his bravery, his non-conformity and his oddness in the face of the authoritarian. There is a famous story related by Thomas of Celano of Francis insisting he be led through Assisi naked, to be humbled before the people of the town. He was taken – still at his own insistence – to the place where criminals were traditionally displayed to the populace, where he loudly confessed his sin to all: “You think I am a holy man,

²¹ Compare St Augustine of Hippo, who leaves us writings and for whom we can find accurate historical information, but no biography of personality.

as do those who, on the basis of my example, leave the world and enter the Order and lead the life of the brothers. Well, I confess to God and to you that during my illness I ate meat and some stew.”²² The illness that Francis refers to was probably quartan fever,²³ a diagnosis suggested by the duration of the illness and the fever’s prevalence in Italy at the time.

This little incident illustrates the fervour of Francis, certainly, but it also gives us an excellent example of how the events of Francis’ life were encoded for us by his biographers. It passes at least one of the acid tests of the historiographer as well, incidentally: Bonaventure is clearly embarrassed by the story, and claims “his action certainly seems to have been intended as an omen reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah rather than as an example” for the people. This is clearly not the case, as Gelber notes (Gelber 17): why make your penance public, even civic, displaying yourself as a criminal before God and the people in the way real criminals convicted of crimes against the community if you do not intend to make your behaviour exemplary? In any case, Francis manages to make his mark through stories like these. There are lots of this kind of anecdote, and it is

²² Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima* (Rome: Tipografia della pace, 1880) 1.19.52.

²³ Quartan fever is a common type of malaria caused by the *plasmodium malariae* parasite, less serious than other strains. It was very common in Italy in the mediaeval period, but is now unknown in Europe.

this kind of anecdote that captures first the attention, then the hearts, of the community of believers, a community that Gadda was part of in his formative childhood years.

This is the fame, then, of Francis. His work as a reforming influence within the Church in the thirteenth century grows from this, increasing further his fame and then his influence in a circular manner. The acclaim of the people brings him the admiration of the Pope, his acceptance of papal authority brings benefits from increased exposure. His Franciscan order was officially instituted in 1209, and Pope Innocent III could be glad that Francis had chosen to remain within the Church in a time of political and religious uncertainty. The Franciscan order quickly grew in size and in influence.

In certain ways, St Francis of Assisi reads like a new Jesus, a Jesus re-imagined as a mediaeval Umbrian. The short anecdotes in which his life is recorded are akin to the gospel narratives: simple, neat, heroic.²⁴ Francis, it was said, received

²⁴ See Bonaventure's *Life of Saint Francis*, particularly VI 6; VIII 5; XI 2; Gadda owned a copy of Bonaventure's *Vita di San Francesco* (Florence: Rinascimento del Libro, 1931).

the stigmata²⁵ and dived into a thorn bush to escape temptation – clearly acts recalling Jesus’ sufferings as recorded in the New Testament and the Stations of the Cross.²⁶ Francis’ slightly renegade position in relation to the Church also apes Jesus’ position in relation to first century Judaism (and the Pharisees in particular) as recorded by the gospel writers. Whether Francis’ biographers were consciously seeking such a connection is a matter that we have no room to discuss here. It is my opinion, however, that parallels can be fairly – and usefully – drawn between the two figures.

Gadda may well have thought the same thing, or perhaps he was affected by the Franciscan myth more profoundly than by the Jesus version. Whatever the case, Francis – the saint and the name – hardly separate from the saint – appear throughout the Gadda corpus. In *The Philosophers’ Madonna* we have a litany of all the Francises available to Italian Catholicism of the 1920s, as we will see. Gadda names not just Francis of Assisi, of course, but those also who took his name and his example. The Francis of Paola even named his offshoot of the Franciscans “the Minims”, a superlative version of the modest mainstream of

²⁵ The visible signs of the crucifixion on his body: the five Holy Wounds inflicted on Jesus at his death. Francis’ stigmata were present on his body for an extended time, but never became infected. His case is accepted as genuine by the Catholic Church.

²⁶ The Stations of the Cross are a retelling of the Passion narrative, usually in pictorial form, that adorn most Churches in the Catholic tradition.

“Frates Minores”. Although nowadays Francis of Paola is a relatively obscure saint,²⁷ Gadda may have been more familiar with him than most: there is a church dedicated to the founder of the Minims on via Manzoni, Milan, just across the street from Gadda’s birthplace.

In *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, Gadda chooses Francesco as the name of his central character.²⁸ Francesco “Don Ciccio” Ingravallo should therefore be read in the light of the Franciscan example, especially in terms of his uneasy compromise with authority. Ingravallo has as much difficulty with the temporal authority of the Fascist state and Dottor Fumi as Francis did with the Church and the Pope, yet both submit and are ultimately obedient. “The authorities” or rather the authority singular, are the subject of several digressions and linking passages in the novel. The tone ranges from the almost neutral to the downright slanderous. Consider, for example, the following:

L’autorità s’ereno scocciate a pensà che a Roma, e de giorno, in d’un medesimo palazzo, fossero successi du delitti come quelli, er siconno più terribile der primo. E poi e poi: er fermo del Valdarena a giudicà da come se presentaveno le cose, nun reggeva pe gnente: e il fermo del commendatore Angeloni... manco quello nun approdava a nulla [...] A giustificazione dell’operato de la polizzia, e delle autorità gerarchicamente strutturate nello stato etico, va pur ditto, per altro,

²⁷ At least outside of Italy.

²⁸ It is instructive that the name “Francesco” appears seven times in the novel, and on four of those occasions it is the saint and not the character to which the name applies.

che proprio er giorno prima, domenica 20 marzo, era sbarcato ar molo Beverello, a le undici undici mezza, er maharagia di Scerpure [...] pe da visita a l'Artifice de li nuovi destini de la patria, ed eventualmente a le tombe dei due fabbricatori e a la casa natale der medesimo, ch'è una bicocca de pochi sordi, però.
(QP RR II 128)

The authorities were annoyed at the thought that in Rome, in broad daylight and in the same building, two crimes like that had taken place, the second more terrible than the first. And then, and then: the arrest of Valdarena, seeing how things were going, wouldn't hold water: and the taking into custody of Commendatore Angeloni ... that hadn't added up to anything either [...] In justification of the work of the police and of the higher authorities in the ethic state, it must be said, on the other hand, that the very day before, Sunday the 20th, there had disembarked at Naples' Beverello pier, at eleven or half-past, the Maharajah of Sherpur [...] on a visit to the Artificer of the Fatherland's new destiny, and possibly the grave of the two procreators and the birthplace of the same, which is a two-bit hovel, however.
(AM 173)

The two men are also both outsiders in Rome, Francis being from the backwaters of central Italy of which Ingravallo's Molise is the modern equivalent. Both Francescos play the role of the "Suffering Servant",²⁹ Ingravallo suffering headaches and pain throughout the novel to mirror the self-deprivation and illness in the life of Francis. There is also the psychological pain

²⁹ As in Isaiah 53. For Bonaventure's comparison of Francis to Isaiah's "Suffering Servant", see above.

that is associated with both sexuality and separation from family in Francis' life. While Francis threw his body into a thorn bush to quell the longings of the flesh, Ingravallo is tormented by his attraction to Liliana, who also symbolizes a mother figure to him. The pain of this dual association profoundly affects the course of the novel and our sympathy with Ingravallo's character. We think particularly of the discovery of Liliana's body and the immediate pang that that causes in the detective: 'don Ciccio rammemorò subito, con un lontano pianto nell'anima, povera mamma' (QP RR II 59). This moment of exquisite agony is both inside and outside the text (Amberson 2008, 33, Lugnani 2001), our attention drawn to it as it sits on the page in parenthesis, linking Carlo Emilio to Francesco, and pointing us to the significance that lies beyond the text: there is a crypto-Christic attitude to Ingravallo as well. We are invited on the very first page of the novel to note that he is an unmarried man of some 30-odd years (35, missing the mooted age of the Messiah by a couple of years, though at the perfect age for a Dantean journey) for whom his landlady has hoped for many years. "La sua padrona di casa lo venerava, a non dire adorava" (QP RR II 15) "Era per lei lo "statale distintissimo" lungamente sognato" (ibid.). In the second scene in which we see her acting as landlady, she is compared to a "cresimanda" (conferimanda) (QP RR II 250), her preparation of *caffelatte* is "canonico" (ibid).

The fact that Don Ciccio is annoyed by her prayer “ora et labora pro nobis” (QP RR II 261) can be read in two ways: is he suggesting that he himself does not need to be prayed for when he takes offense at the “pro nobis”? Even the addition of the “escluse donne” that Gadda tells us was in the advert that Ingravallo answered, with its possible “duplice possibilità di interpretazione” (QP RR II 15), suggests that celibacy is essential in signora Antonini’s take on the perfect tenant³⁰. Her status as one of the minor characters of the novel, belonging to a kind false urban peasantry that Gadda heartlessly lampoons, marks her out as particularly qualified to recognise and represent the religious. Throughout the tradition of the novel in general, it is women of exactly this sort who are associated with piety, religious practice and the supernatural. Proust is one of the kinder writers when he wonders whether the grooves in the holy water bowl had been worn by generations of pious fingers belonging to just such women. Their presence in the novels of modernism is almost a byword for the kind of religious hypocrisy that is so easily ridiculed. At the same time, changing the focus of signora Antonini’s veneration from a church or a saint to our Don Ciccio forces us to re-evaluate his character. In the very first pages of the novel, Gadda has given us a landlady whose very character we are familiar

³⁰ The double interpretation is first the literal one – no women, and secondly an implication that the house is being used as a brothel. The association with prostitutes may help us in identifying a crypto-Christ (or crypto-Francis) in the figure of Ingravallo.

with in our previous reading, but instead substituted worship of the divine for worship of the detective. With this in mind, we can begin to read Ingravallo as a kind of reinterpretation of the Francis/Jesus paradigm, a theme to which I will return.

The other extended reference to Francis in Gadda's opus is to be found in the short novel *La Madonna dei filosofi* (1963) [*The Philosophers' Madonna* (2008)]. This time Gadda is expanding upon the various saints of the same name:

[Il magistrato è] nato a Paola, la ridente cittadina tirrenica che diede i natali al secondo Francesco. Di questo, che confortò il re Luigi morente [...] i cittadini di Paola conclamano con occhi incandescenti l'indiscutibile superiorità rimpetto a' di lui omonimi primo terzo e quarto, quinto e sesto, cioè umbro, navarrino, valentino, savoiaro e narbonese.
(MF RR I 82-3)

[The magistrate] had been born in Paola, the charming little Tyrrhenian town that gave birth to the second Francis. The citizens of Paola proclaim with gleaming eyes the indisputable superiority of this one, who comforted the dying King Louis ... , over those namesakes of his numbered first, third and forth, fifth and sixth, that is from Umbria, Navarre, Valencia, Savoy and Narbo.
(PM 33-4)

Gadda goes on to detail and name the Francises that he enumerates here in one of the earliest of his famous digressions as Francis of Assisi, Francis Xavier,

Francis Borgia, Francis of Sales and John-Francis Regis, all saints in the Catholic canon. The brief biographical details that Gadda provides here are of interest precisely because of the way that the narrator tosses them lightly before the reader. There is an assumption that the reader will be just as familiar with these names as Gadda himself clearly is, an assumption that is misplaced as the translator of the English edition – in what is otherwise an exceptionally sensitive piece of work – misses the significance of Francis Xavier (a well-known saint even to the English-speaking world) and renders him Saverio, as his name runs in Italian. A slight error, but one that shows that even the most skilled and careful of modern readers must be constantly on one's guard for Gadda's allusions. The fact that thus a familiar name is made exotic and distant from the reader is a problem for the translator, but the fact remains that many modern readers of the Italian original would have problems identifying the Francises listed here. The tone of the digression belies the amount of knowledge that Gadda has clearly gathered on these saints. Some of the autobiographical allusions – for example in the case of John-Francis Regis – are, while not exactly obscure, at least not the first thing that would be used to define their lives.

Gadda has therefore been careful to assemble these figures and to draw attention to the name of Francis. He has focussed primarily on the second of them, Francesco di Paola, perhaps because, as we have mentioned, the church across the road from his birthplace on via Manzoni is consecrated to him, but spreads out from this focal point until we consider each of them. The order in which he has us do this privileges the first Francis – the tamer of the “wolf of Agobbio” – and presents not just Francesco di Paola, but the others as somehow versions of this original. If we then accept the premise that Francis of Assisi is a re-imagining of Jesus of Nazareth, we have a proliferation of Christ figures dotted across south-western Europe, living the Gospel and achieving Sainthood through their sufferings. The fact that this list comes in the detailing of the judgement against the hapless Engineer Baronfo – who was hit on the head for calling a young ruffian a “Calabrese” – adds a delicious irony. Is the Engineer here a pastiche of our author, conspired against by circumstance, coincidence and fate? The comparison to the sufferings of the saints is one that must not pass unnoticed. Like Ingravallo, Baronfo is a suffering servant, a possible Christ. Here, however, is a hopelessly mixed up comic Christ.

His job is travelling the country, not preaching, but selling. He is entirely on the wrong side of the “virgin birth” story: he is charged with having fathered little Gigetto, a charge he denies: “if he spent six nights out of seven in the train, how could he have got mixed up in a tale like this?” (PM 37-8). His attraction to Maria is of the correct sort, perhaps, if we figure her as the Magdalene and remember that as he suffers, he reveals his faith in that other Mary, the Madonna who is protectress of the Ripamonti family. In this reading, Baronfo is as much kind of failed Jesus – does he in fact die at the end? – unforgiving, acid-tongued, uncharismatic, as he is a failed Caesar. As the narrative itself ends, Maria is left grieving over his body as he loses consciousness, and it is for her to cry to the heavens: “Papà, ... salvaci, scendete!” in place of a “joking Jesus”, a Christ *si bourgeois*.

Au contraire, trop bourgeois. Perhaps Cesare Baronfo should have learned from the Francises of Assisi and Paolo and practiced their much-celebrated humility and poverty, given that their chastity may be a bridge too far. For above all, it is this denial of the world that the figure of Francis represents. He is Christ seen as imagined by the mediaeval Italian, certainly, but he is above all a version of St Paul’s Christ, the Christ recognised by Kierkegaard. He is not of this world,

the world of the flesh and money. Baronfo's illnesses cannot be cured by his spending money on Dottor Cassia's iron pills – the Cassia, of course, being the opposite road out of Rome from the Appia, the road of Peter and Paul – but by the attention of his Mary (Magdalene), who is patroness of apothecaries, thanks to her anointing of Jesus' feet. Baronfo fails in his mission because he is not even aware that his mission exists. It is difficult to imagine Francis if he had followed his father and become a sales agent, as Baronfo did.

Gadda himself did not move into the business of "selling cloth" (or any other of his Francesco Gadda's business dealings, as a matter of fact) after the death of his father, and perhaps the Baronfo character is a deliberate attempt to theorize on his fate had he chosen – or been chosen for – that path in life. In that case he could not have failed to notice the irony of having been the son of a Francesco who did not abandon the cloth trade for the worship of God. In this place sits the uncomfortable Cesare Baronfo – a parody of Carlo Emilio, and perhaps an expression of contrition for the author's unbelief. If that is going too far we can at least postulate a longing in Gadda for a simpler sort of existence, where there are such things as divine, perfect and absolute truths. In his response to Francis, the ultimate preacher of the simple life, the life away from the world, Gadda

writes with humour that is tinged with the regret that things, for him at least, are not as they ought to be.

3: 2 Santa Francesco e Santa Cristoforo

In this section, I intend to introduce the mythical figure of Saint Christopher and discuss in what ways Gadda used his legend and to what possible purpose. I will show what characteristics Christopher has in common with Francis, and begin the section with further discussion of the Umbrian saint.

Francis of Assisi had a difficult relationship with his father. His father imprisoned him, beat him and eventually brought him before the bishop of Assisi that Francis might be forced to submit to his will. Francis famously stepped out of all his clothes, giving everything back to his earthly father. Their differing worldviews, Brother Leo and the other biographers tell us, meant that the two men were incompatible. In all this, his mother offered her son love, freedom and represented for him the ideal of Christian life. Perhaps it was this that caused Francis to be suspicious of the paternal influence in his life and to reject the opportunity to become a father in his own right. This is speculation,

but what is interesting is that Francis on more than one occasion rejected the official role of a “father” in setting up his religious order.

“Father” is, of course, a common form of address to priests in the Catholic tradition. Francis rejected this norm and instead privileged the feminine form of address. In fact, one of the few pieces of writing we have from Francis’ own hand tells us this. Addressed to Brother Leo around 1220, he begins “Ita dico tibi, fili mi, et sicut mater.” As a mother to her child, so I speak to you, my son. (Francis 76) The letter offers advice and Francis’ help in time of need, the kind of help and advice that we would normally associate with the mother-figure in a relationship. Furthermore, the 1221 *Regula prima* of the order states in chapter nine that:

Et quilibet diligat et nutriet fratrem suum, sicut mater diligit et nutrit filium suum, in quibus Deus eis gratiam largietur.

The friars are bound to care for and nourish one another as brothers by the means that God gives them, just as a mother cares for and nourishes her son.

(Francis 10)

Later the wording of this rule was changed slightly, indicating perhaps that the friars were not entirely comfortable with this feminine imagery.³¹ Apparently it was not a preference among the friars, but a preference specific to Francis himself. He preferred to be addressed as “Mother” by the brothers, a fact recorded reluctantly by Thomas of Celano, who prefers himself to refer to him as “Father” or “Brother”. Francis, in his retelling of his early visions, is a mothering hen, gathering her brood under her wings, or a bride of a king who has many children.³²

Alongside the historical Francis, whose personal preferences and writings have come down to us, we may consider the figure of Saint Christopher, an almost entirely legendary figure. Christopher is perhaps a kind of early Christian version of the “Unknown Soldier”, a name that can be used to indicate the Christian status of any martyr whose name is not otherwise recorded. This interpretation is further strengthened by the name associated with Christopher

³¹ Cfr Gelber. in Hawley (1987, 20). These are not the only times the “mother” image is used in the writings of Francis. For example we find in his first Letter to All the Faithful (speaking of Christ): “We are His mothers when we bear Him in our heart and in our body, begotten by pure love and a clean conscience, and when we bring him forth by holy actions which should enlighten others as an example.” (Francis of Assisi, *Writings of Saint Francis*. Trans. C. E. De La Warr. London: Burns & Oates, 1907, 60.)

³² Ibid, p. 22.

before his conversion: Reprobis, clearly an allegorical appellation. The life of St Christopher, as it is given in the *Legenda aurea*, describes the saint as a mighty man, who served the devil as the most powerful of lords until the day that he found out that the devil himself feared the very symbols of Christ. He then converted, took the name of Christopher and died a martyr's death after passing a number of ordeals and performing miracles.

Perhaps precisely because Christopher is so obviously a mythical figure, a distinct legend has persisted alongside the one offered by the *Golden Legend*. In the other popular version of his myth, he places a child, a baby, on his shoulders and begins to ford a river. As his course through the water progresses, he sinks deeper and deeper into it, the child getting heavier and heavier. This supernatural event is followed by the equally miraculous revelation that the child is in fact Christ, just the person that Christopher had been seeking all along. He takes his name, Χριστόφορος, after he realises he has been carrying the Christchild.

This is the legend that has seen Christopher become one of the most popular of saints, and perhaps it is also this legend that saw him removed from Roman

Calendar of Catholic Saints in 1969. Yet while the ahistoricity of Christopher is disastrous for his status as Saint, it is perfect for his status as archetype. Christopher is a blank canvas, almost entirely unblemished by historical traces, onto which successive generations of believers and unbelievers have drawn their concerns and hopes. For our purposes, that leaves an image that is most useful and interesting in its many ambiguities.

From reading his writing, we can surmise that Gadda thought so too. He uses the – somewhat unusual – name of Cristoforo in *Quer pasticciaccio* to represent a somewhat unusual figure. Cristoforo is an employee of Remo Balducci, a man, we are told, of massive stature who facilitates Balducci's hunting exploits. After the robbery of la Contessa Menegazzi next door,

[Liliana] aveva pregato Cristoforo, il fattorino del marito, di venire a cenare e di rimaner la notte ... Era un omaccione da tener in rispetto i ladri col solo fiato: molto pratico di cani, di lepri, di fucili di caccia.
(QP RR II 50)

[Liliana] had asked Cristoforo, her husband's clerk, to come to dinner and to stay the night ... He was a huge man who could scare off a thief with a puff of his breath: a good man with dogs, rabbits, shotguns.
(AM 55)

Cristoforo is also an excellent suspect in the case of the murder of Liliana. He was in the house the morning of the murder (although he claims to have left

early). His innocence is not relayed to us by interview (as it is for Remo) nor by the Police's cross-checking of facts (as in the case of Valdarena), but through his very physicality. It is his actions and reactions that tell us what we need to know: we have to believe that he is innocent because of his reaction to the news of the crime, rather than factual evidence. It is his face and his body that tells us of his innocence:

Parve lo schiantasse una folgore. [...] Se fece er segno de la croce.
Lagrima gli gocciolarano su la pelle der faccione, un po' vizza.
(QP RR II 64)

The news shattered him, like a thunderbolt. [...] He made the Sign of the Cross. Tears dribbled down the somewhat wrinkled skin of his face.
(AM 75-6)

These nonverbal proofs of innocence are all we – the readers – have, as the actual police interview is performed offstage by lo Sgranfia. There is, in the same passage, a different sign of Cristoforo's physicality: he doesn't drink milk as it is bad for his stomach. This factoid is intriguing, and it sits uneasily with the reader, who automatically searches for the explanation. There is no need for Gadda to mention it – there is no reason for Cristoforo to mention it either – and yet, it is there.. Is it to be read as a renouncement of the feminine, of the mother's milk that was absent in Liliana? There is something else he can't do:

look at the corpse. “Nun me riesce de guardala.” (ibid.) The rejection of the physicality of Liliana, the paradigm of botched femininity is telling: we are reminded in this moment of Christopher’s other significance, and his most important symbol: the Child he carries, not in a biological sense, but in sense that is so deep in his iconography that it has become part of his name.

There is another Saint Christopher that is used in contrast to the childless Liliana, this time one with the *dynamis*, the potential, to reproduce voluntarily abnegated.

Prima je face fa, su le ginocchia, un par de giri ar cappello, adagio, adagio: co quele mani (e co quei piedi) che pareva san Cristoforo.
(QP RR II 132)

First he turned his hat around on his knees ... with those hands (and those feet) that made him look like Saint Christopher.
(AM 177)

It is Don Lorenzo Corpi, the Parish Priest of Liliana’s Santi Quattro Incoronati. He is depicted here as if he were a monumental statue in Saint John Lateran’s, a colossal man like the Christopher of legend. He is shown to us early in the novel as the perfect putative father for Liliana’s potential child.

Don Lorenzo, sì: nonostante la veste nera, nonostante l’incompatibilità sacramentale, dei due sacramenti ... divergenti.

Anche in don Lorenzo. Che doveva essere una discreta torre, sto mulo. Per lo meno la δύναμις del padre doveva avercela.
(QP RR II 22)

Don Lorenzo, despite his black cassock, despite the sacramental incompatibility, of the two sacraments which were – divergent. Even Don Lorenzo. Who must have been a tower of strength, that mule. At least he must have had the δύναμις of a father.
(AM 14)

Against the childlessness of Liliana stands the figure of Saint Christopher, one of the very few male saints (Antony of Padua and Saint Joseph are the others) who is always depicted with a child. In the case of Joseph the presence of the Christ Child might be taken for granted, but in Christopher's case it is quite particular. The Christopher who carries the baby is the furthest from whatever historical reality there is to his name – it is the most constructed, most artificial, most narrative version of the saint. And it is this version that Gadda has in mind.

In “Grumi di pensiero silvano”, found in *Quaderni dell'ingegnere* volume I, we find the following design idea:

Finestra 400esca ... sotto terracotta con gialli e azzurri rappresentante il Santo Portatore che porta sul collo il Bambino (Cristoforo).
(Quaderni dell'ingegnere, vol 1, 1)

Fifteenth century window ... beneath it terracotta, on which is painted in yellows and blues the Carrying Saint, carrying on his shoulders the Baby Jesus (Christopher).

In Saint Christopher the overt masculinity of the military, brawny giant is tempered, even alloyed with the symbolic maternity implied by carrying the baby. The figure of the pregnant man is a popular image in mediaeval Europe,³³ and the baroque and grotesque nature of some of the associated tales would certainly have appealed to Gadda. In this reading, Christopher “bears Christ” in the same fashion that the Blessed Virgin Mary “bore Christ”. One must be careful here, however, in attributing points of view and dispositions to Gadda himself. It is tempting to go further in this and read, after Marchesini (Marchesini), Gadda as a crossdressing homosexual, desirous of combining the qualities of the masculine and the feminine, but the mediaeval sources for Saint Christopher (and indeed Saint Francis) do not support this. The pregnancy of the pregnant man in literature had little to do with sex, and Francis’ vision (alluded to above) of himself as the mother of many children has no sexual content. Thus, while we can, if we would like to, read Christopher and Gadda’s use of Christopher as a kind of longing for a deeper fulfilment in terms of homosexuality and gender “confusion” – not unlike the song “For Today I am a Boy” by Antony and the Johnsons (2000) – it seems to me that a more neutral

³³ Cfr Roberto Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man, Social Orders* (Chur: Harwood Academic, 1991) especially chapter 2 (33-47)

interpretation is just as valuable. If Saint Francis represents the world of the mind, of contemplation, then Christopher is the opposite: he represents strength, the body, action.

3: 3 San Giorgio

The small church in the little town of Eupilio in Brianza is the parish closest to Villa Gadda in the neighbouring village of Longone al Segrino. This church is named for the patron of the town, Saint George, and is in all likelihood the church that Gadda would have attended in the time that he spent in Longone.³⁴ Saint George also appears in a number of Gadda's narratives – "San Giorgio in casa Brocchi" and *L'Adalgisa* foremost amongst them – so the saint has quite some significance for the writer, as several critics have noted.³⁵

George himself inhabits a world of hagiography somewhere between history and legend, a position not unusual for saints of his importance and antiquity, although unlike in the case of Saint Christopher, there is at least some trace of a biography. The closest that we come to a historical personage as a basis for the figure of the saint is a certain George of Lydda, a soldier in the Roman army

³⁴ This is a reasonable assumption, but it should be noted the only mention of Gadda's attendance of a specific church for religious services is the found the quotation from his sister Clara, cited here in chapter 1: 1.

³⁵ Cfr particularly Pedriali, 2007 section 2 which was the catalyst for this investigation.

who was martyred under Diocletian on the 23rd of April 302. The more famous narrative of George and the Dragon was inserted much later, and appears even to come from a quite different timeframe altogether. This tale appears in the *Legenda aurea*, although George had been identified with war, battles and the military from much earlier, and the Dragon motif is associated with returning Crusaders and courtly romance. The presence of the story in Jacopo da Voragine's collection ensured that it circulated and was widely read throughout Europe: in England the book was one of the first published by William Caxton, with the tale of George and the Dragon being one of the most appreciated.

[T]he dragon appeared and came running to them, and S. George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground. And after said to the maid: Deliver to me your girdle, and bind it about the neck of the dragon and be not afeard. When she had done so the dragon followed her as it had been a meek beast and debonair. Then she led him into the city, and the people fled by mountains and valleys, and said: Alas! alas! we shall be all dead. Then S. George said to them: Ne doubt ye no thing, without more, believe ye in God, Jesu Christ, and do ye to be baptized and I shall slay the dragon.

(Voragine 58)

The *Legenda* also records the origin of the Cross of Saint George and its significance to the Crusaders.

It is also found in the history of Antioch, that when the Christian men went over sea to conquer Jerusalem, that one, a right fair young man, appeared to a priest of the host and counselled him that he should bear with him a little of the relics of S. George, for he was conductor of the battle, and so he did so much that he had some. And when it was so that they had assieged Jerusalem and durst not mount ne go up on the walls for the quarrels and defence of the Saracens, they saw appertly S. George which had white arms with a red cross, that went up tofore them on the walls, and they followed him, and so was Jerusalem taken by his help.

(ibid.)

Saint George boasts a huge number of patronages of countries, from England to Ethiopia, and cities, from Moscow to Preston, as well as being patron of agricultural workers, horses and a whole host of military and chivalric practices and occupations. He was also closely associated with Gadda's home city of Milan, even if St Ambrose is usually designated her patron.³⁶ George's appearance in sacred art and popular depictions usually show him in battle with the Dragon, and it is this image in particular that has come down to the modern era: a martial saint, clothed in armour, giving battle.³⁷

³⁶ See Giovanni Antonio Castiglione, *Mediolanenses antiquitates ex urbis parcijs collectæ, ichnographicis ipsarum tabulis, recentibus rerum memorijs, varijs ecclesiasticis ritibus auct. & illustrate, etc* (Milan: I. B. Bidell, 1625) and Pierre pseud Saintyves, *Saint Christophe, successeur d'Anubis, d'Hermes et d'Heracles* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1936).

³⁷ One famous depiction is Raphael's *Saint George and the Dragon* (1504-06).

For Gadda, George is just this kind of a heroic figure, the brave warrior ready to give his life for the damsel (as in the popular version of the tale) or indeed his faith (in the more historical narrative). That Carlo Emilio failed to do this in his life as a soldier clearly rankles with him.

[I]l maledetto destino vuol divellermi dalle pure origini della mia anima e privarmi delle mie forze più pure, per fare di me un uomo comune, volgare, tozzo, bestiale, borghese, traditore di sé stesso, italiano, “adatto all’ambiente”. Tutto ha congiurato contro la mia grandezza, e prima di ogni cosa il mio animo, debole, docile, facile ad esser preso dalle ragioni altrui ... [la] realtà di questi anni, salvo alcune fiamme generose e fugaci, è merdosa: e in essa mi sento immedesimare ed annegare.
(GGP SGF II, 863)

Accursed destiny wants to pull me away from the pure origins of my soul and deprive me of my greatest strengths, to make of me a common man, vulgar, dumpy, brutish, middle-class, self-betraying, Italian, “adapted to the situation”. Everything has conspired against my greatness, conspired above all against my soul, weak, docile, easily led by the reasoning of others... In reality, excepting a few generous and fleeting highlights, these years are shitty: I feel I am taken over by shit, drowning in it.

In contrast to the saint on his high horse, in gleaming armour, Gadda sees himself “tozzo, bestiale, borghese”, drowning in shit: there cannot be a more eloquent reversal of the ideal of the glorious



warrior, that brave dragon-defeater of whom George is the archetype.

An archetype that Gadda recognized and made use of: in *La Meccanica* (1970 – although the composition dates from as early as 1928) Gadda has his female lead, Zoraide, contemplate Saint George as a “giovanetto biondo chiuso tutta la persona nell’arme” (QP RR II 492) (a blond young man, his whole body enclosed in armour). The image that Zoraide is considering is a painting by Giorgione known as the Castelfranco Madonna or the “Madonna and Child between Saints Francis and Nicasius”,³⁸ this last being the “Giorgio” that Zoraide is so taken with: “le piaceva immensamente ... lo sognò di notte”. Above all, she is taken with “Giorgio” precisely because he is in comparison with Francis. Zoraide is not here to be read as a figure for whom religious devotion is the main consideration: on the contrary, she is mistaken in her identification of the saint. Nor is she rational in her choice: surely the authentic

³⁸ It is unclear to me whether Gadda was deliberate, mistaken or mis-informed as to the identity of Nicasius. In the past, the saint had been variously identified by art historians as George, Nicasius or Liberalis, the patron saint of Castelfranco. Gadda may be showing Zoraide’s ignorance of the identity of the saint, thus drawing attention to the carnal basis for her attraction to him, or he may simply be repeating the contemporary scholarship on the artwork. He refers to the same image in *Il primo libro delle Favole*, this time naming the saint “Liberale”. It is perhaps most likely that he was unaware of the now-accepted identification of the saint as Nicasius, and intended Zoraide to be taken as mistaken by the reader. See Giorgio Pinotti, “San Giorgio in casa Brocchi,” *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* 2004.1 (2004) and especially Federica G. Pedriali, “Cain and other symmetries (the early alternatives),” *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* 2007.6 (2007).

and Italian Francis is to be preferred over the semi-mythical and foreign George? Instead her attraction to the saint is superficial, carnal, sexual.

This is a sign of a sexual jealousy that we will see repeated in Gadda's work, from *La Meccanica* to *Eros e Priapo*. It is seldom more explicit than in the second chapter of this latter, in which Gadda takes out his frustrations on the good-looking young men (like Zoraide's "Giorgio") and the woman who fall for them.

Non nego alla femina il diritto ch'ella "prediliga li giovini, come quelli che sono li più feroci" (Machiavelli, *Il Principe*) cioè i più aggressivi sessualmente; ciò è suo diritto e anzi dirò suo dovere. Non nego che la Patria chieda alle femine di adempiere al loro dovere verso la Patria che è, soprattutto, quello di lasciarsi fottere. E con larghezza di vedute. Ma "li giovini" se li portino a letto e non pretendano acclamarli prefetti e ministri alla direzione d'un paese. E poi la femina adempia ai suoi obblighi e alle sue inclinazioni e non stia a romper le tasche con codesta ninfomania politica, che è cosa inzita. La politica non è fatta per la vagina: per la vagina c'è il su' tampone appositamente conformato per lei dall'Eterno Fattore e l'è il toccasana dei toccasana; quando non è impestato, s'intende. (SGF II 245)

I don't wish to deny women the right to "prefer the young , as they are more ferocious" (Machiavelli, *The Prince*³⁹), that is, the most aggressive sexually; that is the right of women and their duty. I don't deny that the Patria asks of women that they adhere to their duty to the Patria which is, above all, to let themselves be fucked. And with broadmindedness! But "the young" they take them to bed shouldn't

³⁹ The quote that Gadda refers to here is translated as "she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity" by Mansfield in the 1985 Chicago University Press publication of *The Prince* (Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. J. Mansfield (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985, 101).

pretend to acclaim themselves prefects and ministers managing a country. And the women should adhere to their obligations and inclinations and not break the bank with this political nymphomania. Politics is not made for the vagina: for the vagina there is the tampon, appositely made for it by the Eternal Maker and is the miracle cure of all miracle cures; when not infected, you understand.

That sexual attractiveness is no qualification for government is a thesis that can be readily accepted, but the key issue here is one of psychology, namely that Gadda feels it necessary to say such things, and in such strong language. That Zoraide is guilty of the same offence as the “femine” of the *Eros e Priapo* invective is shown not only by the dismissive use of the appellation “youth” – giovanotto and giovini – but by the military trappings of both George and the young fascists, who go around “per esibirsi stivaluti e armati di coltello al corso” (SGF II 245) “exhibiting themselves booted and armed with a hunting knife”. The splendour of shining boots, of soldiers – or blackshirts – on parade, of symbolic, phallic knives: all part of a lie that Gadda detests because he knows it to be a lie, because of the women (especially women) who believe in it, and because he once believed it himself.

Saint George comes to represent this falseness, this promise of romantic and heroic warfare, and to symbolize Gadda’s failure to become a hero by

conquering or dying gloriously in the Great War. We meet him again in opposition to a similar figure to Saint Francis (a plain, honest saint, a little drab in colouring perhaps) in the shape of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, in the short story “San Giorgio in Casa Brocchi”. This time the central figure is, like in the Giorgione painting, a mother. The Contessa Brocchi is considering an image of Saint George in terms that echo Zoraide’s emotions: “Cosa sia, non lo so... ma ha certi occhi... da sognarseli di notte...” (QP RR II 645) The implication is again that women – and the common-minded person in general – is persuaded by, seduced by the charms of a Saint George figure, a character that represents a showy falseness. Compared with Saint Aloysius, George’s bravery in facing a mythical Dragon seems vulgar and misplaced – it is worth noting that, in Jacopo da Voraggine’s version, the Dragon is slain whilst bound and incapacitated – while Aloysius renounced all, even his health, to die of plague contracted through tending the sick. The genuine danger – the inevitability of defeat, even – in the battle with infectious disease is of more human value than armed combat against the Dragon. Yet George, with his heroic posture, his good looks, his phallic lance and his glorious martyrdom is preferred to the aristocrat who renounced all his worldly advantages to die of sickness aged 24. George is the ultimate example of the hypocrisy of society, and his victory (as we see it in

Gadda) is over more deserving, more perfectly Christian men like Aloysius and, of course, Francis.

And yet, it seems that there is more than simple hypocrisy behind society's choice: or perhaps it might be better to say that there is more than just society behind this hypocrisy. Gadda, through Zoraide, through Jole, even through Liliana is hinting at something deeper than societal pressure: choosing the George-figure is matter not of education, or of lack of intelligence, or at least not *just* these. It is a matter of biology, of genetics. It is the way that we are, and part of the tragedy of human life. In this way, it is beyond society, beyond the ken of Adalgisa, of Don Corpi, of Conte Agamènnone. And yet it causes pain in the heart of the writer, perhaps spurs him on to write, because it reflects a wound in his past.

The George/Francis opposition can be read as an attempt to deal with a certain autobiographical situation. Gadda's brother Enrico died what was seen, ironically, as a hero's death in the First World War, flying his aeroplane into a mountain in an act of careless bravado. Carlo Emilio's devastation at this is not in question, nor is his affection for his brother while he lived, yet the death of

the younger son denied the elder Gadda the opportunity of sibling rivalry, of working himself out in opposition to the young man who would forever – in death – be the handsome, adored perfect and preferred son of his mother. It likely affected Gadda in ways too profound for mere words.

Naturale immaginare che i laceranti dolori familiari distogliessero Carlo da ogni “idea sensuale”. Suggestiva, anzi, l’ipotesi che la morte di Enrico oltre a render definitivo il rifiuto dell’amore e della vita coniugali, abbia inibito anche l’amore fisico.
(Roscioni 1997 147)

It is natural to imagine that the deep wounds caused by his family situation kept Carlo from any “sensual idea”. Rather, a probable hypothesis is that Enrico’s death, as well as defining Gadda’s refusal of love and conjugal life, also inhibited physical love.

Both Pedriali (1997) and – later – Dombroski (1999) express the view that one of Gadda’s neuroses is a kind of transposed Oedipal Complex in which Gadda’s brother (against whom there can be no retribution) takes the place of the father. In his analysis of *Cognizione del dolore*, Dombroski sees Gonzalo as Gadda’s autobiographical projection:

Simply stated, Gonzalo suffers a pain that cannot be treated because it is too shameful to express: it is a pain rooted in the incontrovertible fact that his brother is the principal object of his mother’s attention. Gonzalo exists in the shadow of life [...] Gadda preserves the ideal of his mother at the very same time [as having her murdered in the novel] having assembled all the proofs of the outrages and miseries she has bourn him, he who is forced to destroy her; in addition, he

saves the ideal of a brother who, on account of his mother's narcissism, he was made to see as the ideal son.
(Dombroski 1999, 83)

It is not going too much further, once we have invoked Freud, to move to Lacan and his re-interpretation of psychoanalysis. As Lacan states in *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (the translation below comes from the citation of this text in Julien 1994, italics are in the original):

In a remarkable article, Freud shows us that when there is a *forced* reduction in the primitive hostility between brothers ... an abnormal *inversion* can turn this hostility in to desire ... In fact, this mechanism is constant: an amorous fixation is the primordial condition for the first integrations of what we call *social tensions* into the instinctive tendencies ... This integration is *nevertheless* accomplished according to the law of least resistance, by means of an affective *fixation* that, for all that, is very close to the solipsistic ego, a fixation that merits being called narcissistic, in which the chosen object is the one most similar to the subject. This is the reason for its homosexual character.
(Julien 1994, 24-5)

Lacan is the first psychoanalyst to call attention to the Fraternal Complex, a complex born in the mirror stage of the child's development. In the analysis quoted above, we might suppose that the loss of a brother in such circumstances as Gadda loses Enrico might count as a "forced reduction" in the ubiquitous sibling rivalry. Julien goes on to describe Lacan's theory in the following terms:

At the very moment when the ego is formed by the image of the other, narcissism and aggressivity are *correlatives*... I am indeed

nothing but the other, yet at the same time, he remains *alienus*, a stranger. This other who is myself is other than myself.

From this is born an aggressivity that is inherent to live in any dual relationship. There is mutual *exclusion*: either ... or ..., one or the other. ... Yet every exclusion leads to its opposite by virtue of a pendular motion, in such a way that no resolution is possible. Such is the “fraternal complex”: an instability that lacks real process.
(ibid, 34)

Gadda's version of this erotic-aggressive relationship is denied any resolution throughout his life because of the misfortune of his brother's death. This impacts on him not only through a sense of loss or grief, but through a loss of *self*. The negation of himself, his work (*Come lavoro: come non lavoro*) and his sexuality is implicit in his choice of opposing saints. Gadda, in Zoraide's reading of the Castelfranco painting, is the self abnegating and holy Francis, the true Christian; Enrico is the desired other-who-is-myself, the mythical Saint George.

There is another light under which Saint George may be read. In her essay “St George as a male virgin martyr”, (2002) Samantha Riches points out that, beyond the history of George as a dragon-slaying man of action, there are a number of incidents in the story of his life that are more often associated with

female saints. Most important among these are the tortures that precede his death:

It is notable that George, with his litany of tortures, seems to fit the archetype of the female virgin martyr far more easily than that of the stereotypical male martyr.

Does this mean George was understood as some kind of crypto-female? This is a possibility, but I would argue that his presentation is actually an attempt to “borrow” another aspect of these female martyrs, specifically their virginity.

(Riches 71)

Riches does not, as can be seen from the quotation above, go on to argue that the gender of George is up for grabs, but to contend that the status of “male virgin martyr” is almost unique to him. She points out also that George undergoes tortures of a highly sexualized nature, in particular one in which he is to be cut in half over a sharpened blade with millstones tied to his ankles.

The blade is shown actually cutting through his fundament; this is highly suggestive of a sexualized discourse which is notably absent in the conventional image of being cut in half, which shows the saw progressing from the top of the body downwards.

(Riches 2002, 72)

In addition to this, Riches also sees in George’s armour, and its removal prior to his suffering, an echo of Joan of Arc and the gendering power of arms. Without his armour, George is understood as emasculated, and the torture scene she describes makes this literal.

I cannot see why we cannot go further and argue that the case of George is one of a confused sexuality in the same way as we have seen Francis and Christopher. The muscular masculinity that we see preferred by Gadda's heroines, in this reading, is a false interpretation of a saint who is, underneath his armour, as ambivalent a figure as Francis, Christopher, Joan of Arc or – another military martyr – Saint Sebastian. Gadda's revenge on George is therefore only postponed: the disappointment of Zoraide is implicit in her desire. The suspicion, therefore, is that the uber-masculine is not the contradiction of the contemplative saint, but simply the same man in a different context: the implication is that in other circumstances, in another war, perhaps, Enrico might have been the one condemned to live and Carlo Emilio the glorious hero of the war.

3: 4 Summing up the Saints

While this survey is in no way exhaustive, this trio of saints that Gadda uses in his fiction is certainly of more than passing interest to those who seek to read Gadda in a critical way, weighing in on biographical, cultural and psychoanalytical readings of the *Gran Lombardo*.

It is perhaps in this last, the psychoanalytic reading, that we find the most to go on. It is certainly the case that Gadda is profoundly fascinated with the figure of Saint Francis, and the “feminine”, or better “not-masculine”, nature of this saint is well attested, even if his preference for the title “mother”, while not a completely obscure fact, is not common knowledge among his devotees. Furthermore, the presence of Christopher, whose ambiguous gender is a central part of his myth, in the early part of Gadda’s life – the doors and decoration of the Church in Epilio, his association with the city of Milan – is highly suggestive.⁴⁰ A young, impressionable man, devout and curious, looking at the male saints carrying children – Antony, Joseph and Christopher are all present in Longone – must have begun to wonder what these symbols meant, must have made up his own ideas to deal with the disconnect that he felt, perhaps bound up with the distance he felt between himself and his own father.

When we discuss the psychology or psychopathology of dead men, we can only offer suspicions and pile up circumstantial evidence for our case.⁴¹ The cultural significance of these figures is not quite as contentious, but the time when the

⁴⁰ Although we must also remember that Christopher is a much less widespread saint in Gadda’s work in general, his name is mentioned more often in *Quer pasticciaccio* than Francis’ is.

⁴¹ One possible deflationary remark that might be made is that Gadda, in his work on hydro-electricity, would have been familiar with Francis turbines made by the San Giorgio company. (Arnaldo Angelini, *La ricostruzione degli impianti idroelettrici sul Velino e sul Nera della Soc. “Terni”* (Milano: AEI, 1946).)

figures of Francis and Christopher and their myths and legends were well known is long gone. Indeed, many Italians I have spoken to are not even aware that Francis is one of their country's patrons. However, Gadda could have reasonably expected his contemporary readers to recognize most, if not all, of the Francises enumerated in the first pages of chapter three of *La Madonna dei filosofi*, for example. Although Saint Christopher is still associated with travellers (modern celebrities Jessica Alba and Ringo Starr still wear medallions when flying), the image of the saint is less visible even to the Christian believer since 1969 when Christopher was removed from the calendar.

What these considerations lead us towards is the symbolic use that Gadda as an artist is able to make of these figures. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the case of George, who Gadda makes available as a supertext, whether intentionally or not mistaking his attribution in the Castelfranco fresco. George is then used to stand in for a whole concept, an entire plot, in fact, the Preferred Suitor / Son, the rival to Gadda's humble, quiet self. The figure of Francis is the proof of this self-image, the reality being neither here nor there, as the author indulges in this self-mythology. It is in this respect that the reader of Gadda will

benefit from the study of the saints: it is another way in which Gadda lets us into his world.

4: The Churches

This chapter will show just how important church buildings are for Gadda and his art. He uses the presence of these buildings to add shape and depth to his narrative, of course, but he is not afraid to play with the ideas generated by the particular associations one makes when reading the name of a church: for example, on more than one occasion, the name of a church is misspelled; on another, a well-known landmark is moved to another city.⁴² Again, we will be concentrating on Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. The importance that Gadda places on the topography of Rome's churches in *Quer pasticciaccio* becomes only fully apparent with close and careful reading – both of the text and historical works – and ideally walking with map in hand round the city. This chapter relies on careful study of this kind.

4: 1 The Churches of Rome and Liliana Balducci

Throughout *Quer Pasticciaccio*, Gadda uses the churches of Rome as more than just landmarks, hinting at their importance to the characters, creating a space for the narrative to happen. In this section, I will draw the reader's attention to this

⁴² The famously Florentine Santa Maria Novella is transposed to Bologna in *Quer pasticciaccio* (QP RR II 132).

use Gadda puts the Churches to, and attempt to draw some conclusions while examining in some detail the topography of Liliana Balducci's Rome. Even via Merulana itself, the central spatial location of the novel, is defined in the novel as the street between the two churches of San Giovanni and Santa Maria Maggiore: in the pages that follow, we will see in what ways the Santi Quattro church is of central importance to the novel, and from there, the resonance it has with the childlessness of Liliana thanks to its historical role as an orphanage and – in terms of legend – its place in the tale of Pope Joan.

Especially in the first chapter of the novel, Gadda uses the names of churches to orientate us in the city of Rome. Even later on, we hear that Ines Cionini was arrested at Santo Stefano Rotondo, or that Ines, the maid, was famous from San Giovanni in Laterano to Santa Maria Maggiore. The locations of the novel are built around churches: churches divide and regulate the space of the novel. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the murder victim, Liliana Balducci.

Signora Balducci's space, her movements within it, her entire life and death is conditioned by the churches around her. She believes in her religion and looks

towards her local parish priest, Don Lorenzo Corpi, for guidance and consolation in her troubled and short life. Don Corpi's church is the ancient Santi Quattro Coronati on the Esquiline Hill, near the Flavian Amphitheatre known as the Colosseum. Liliana's devotion to a specific church, and not to just any old Roman holy building, serves the purpose of making her character more believable and concrete, and this particular church serves the purpose of implying certain things about her psychology. Yet the attachment (or devotion) of Liliana to the Quattro Santi is not without problems. Not least is the location, relative to her home on via Merulana, which is a full quarter of an hour's walk away. Fifteen minutes is not a long walk to make, and not at all, if we put ourselves in the shoes of a religious devotee. But this is Rome, and there are a great many more churches to choose from. Closer to her home on via Merulana are the following churches: Sant'Anna, Sant'Antonio di Padova, Sant'Alfonso all'Esquilino, San Giovanni in Laterano, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, San Clemente, Santo Stefano Rotondo, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Martino ai Monti, Santissimo Salvatore, Santi Marcellino e Pietro.

This list shows us that there were quite a number of churches in the vicinity that Liliana could have been visiting. This gives rise to the question, why did Gadda

choose Santi Quattro? It certainly seemed important enough to him in the context of the novel: not only did he set the essential opening scene of *Il palazzo degli ori* (his attempt at a screenplay version of the novel) there, but even allowed himself to be interviewed for a 1962 television interview with RAI, calling it “un po’ il cuore del romanzo” (Gadda and Ungarelli 174) (more or less the heart of the book). It is clear that the novel itself is situated in this area of Rome at least in part because of the proximity of the church: a church that, for Gadda, represents the “ambiente che potremmo chiamare paleocristano e romanico di Roma” [what we might call the paleochristian or Romanesque environment of Rome].

In *Palazzo degli ori* and the *Letteratura* version of the story, the address is not 219 but 119 via Merulana. The alternative address does not move us significantly closer to the santi Quattro, but it does raise within us the doubt of whether the “palazzo dei pescicane” is to be found in via Merulana at all. This doubt must, however, be rejected given the importance the street has throughout the novel, its location connecting the via Appia to central Rome, the upper-middle class atmosphere that it carries, even the punning on the Merulanian *merli*. The location of these two numbers give us no clue, either: both are, nowadays,

simple commercial properties, 219 serving as a fabric shop and 119 as a themed gift shop at the time of writing⁴³. Slightly more interesting perhaps is that 219 is on a corner that sees via Angelo Poliziano meet via Michelangelo Buonarroti, two figures of the Rinascimento (a writer and a sculptor) both thought to have been homosexual. 119 is also interesting as it is closer to the corner with viale Manzoni: the Roman version of the street Gadda grew up on. The two buildings are in fact rather close together, via Merulana being a street that starts at number one on one side of the road, runs sequentially down that side, then crosses the road at its furthest point and runs, again in sequence, back up to the point at which it started, so that 288 is directly opposite number 1 and 119 and 219 are almost across the road from each other. Either of these possibilities are potentially exciting, but neither moves us any closer to Quattro Santi.

Perhaps the answer lies with some unsuitability to do with the other churches. The magnificent church of Sant'Anna is 10 metres from the door of 219: it is, quite literally, the first thing one would notice on leaving the house. If we take 119 as the starting point, we swap being next to Sant'Anna for being next to Sant'Antonio. Both are named for saints that are traditionally associated with

⁴³ It must also be noted that, given the odd numbering on via Merulana, the street may have been re-numbered at some point in history, meaning that the buildings mentioned in the story are not those that occupy the current location.

the Christ child, Saint Anne being present at the Circumcision of Jesus and Antony being traditionally depicted holding the baby Jesus in his left arm. This, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is unlikely to have been coincidental.

Across the road from viale Manzoni runs the ancient via Labicana, going from east to west towards the Colosseum and past the basilica of San Clemente, passing also the basilica of Marcellino and Pietro. To the north and to the south are two particularly important churches; in fact, Via Merulana was, at its origin, a road through fields that linked two of the great patriarchal basilicas of Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore in the north, and San Giovanni in Laterano in the south. Nonetheless, these gigantic pillars of Christianity are dismissed as locations in the novel and are only used as geographical landmarks. San Giovanni in Laterano is Rome's cathedral church; it is the home of some of the most impressive sculptures of saints anywhere in the city, and the church itself is incredibly grand in scale. In short, it is a magnificent location. Counting against it is, of course, its size. To my mind, the mighty structure suggests a fortification: we are just metres from the Aurelian Walls of the city, and the attached Lateran Palace occasionally did need defending in the past, especially from attacks from the South. Even although Gadda has a taste for fortifications

(one may recall the childhood memories of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan recorded in “Una tigre nel parco” (MI SGF I 74 -79), the style does not fit the reader’s idea of the character of Liliana Balducci. The basilica is not far from 219 (though it is a little closer to 119), and Ingravallo would have to walk past three churches to get from here to Liliana’s body: Sant’Anna, Sant’Antonio di Padova and Santi Marcellino e Pietro.

Santa Maria Maggiore is a little further from 219 than her sister basilica and has the disadvantage – in terms of the effort required to walk to it – of being uphill. It has a number of side chapels that would compare in size to Santi Quattro. It too holds an important place in the identity of Rome. It is the first stop for many tourists from the train station some five hundred metres away. It is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who caused snow to fall on this quiet hilltop in Rome on an August day (4th August 352) and thus to indicate the site of her main basilica. Again, perhaps size – it has two side chapels comparable in size to Santi Quattro – is the best argument against its inclusion in the novel as a place of worship: despite other minor churches in the area being recognised (San Martino ai Monti, for example, the church Remo Balducci was baptised in), and

despite it being referred to in terms of marking a location, Santa Maria Maggiore is almost totally ignored as far as any religious function is concerned.⁴⁴

While we can find nothing serious against these churches on the main drag of via Merulana, we come back to the fact that Santi Quattro was chosen, despite the excellent claims of more magnificent churches. The most noticeable difference is that these churches are relatively modern (15th to 18th century), and Santi Quattro is much older. The church on a little rise above the low lying areas of Ancient Rome is impressively old. Although its origins are far back enough to be relatively obscure, it was standing around in 1084 long enough to be sacked (and to be worth sacking) by the Normans, and it may date back to the 4th century and Pope Militades.⁴⁵ The legend of the Four Saints who give it their name is a tale from the time of Diocletian, although that tale itself is a confused account. Records improve somewhat with the arrival of the

⁴⁴ In the final chapter of the novel, and indeed one of the last sightings of Rome in the novel, Ingravallo imagines – or seems to see – a coffin being taken out of the basilica (QP RR II 263).

⁴⁵ Perhaps it should be noted, given what I have said above about the “fortress-like” San Giovanni in Laterano, that the structure of Santi Quattro recalls a mediaeval stronghold, with a kind of gatehouse “guarding” the one entry point. In reality, however, the structure is less imposing.

Augustinians in the 13th century, and it is now, probably, the best known ancient church in Rome.⁴⁶

The number one rival to that particular title, however, is the basilica of San Clemente close by. It is also closer to via Merulana: a walk from San Clemente to 219 via Merulana is a shorter one – it took me 8 minutes and 27 seconds – than the walk from Santi Quattro. San Clemente is also a most interesting building, of considerable antiquity: it is a Christian church, rebuilt in the 16th century, with the remains of an ancient basilica of Christian use beneath it. Below that is a Mithraeum, a temple devoted to the god Mithras. Mithras was as popular as the Jesus at the time of Constantine though in many respects the religions are similar, having a philosophical connection with Zoroastrianism. In addition to this interesting architecture, the building, as Ngaio Marsh found, is just perfect for a murder mystery. (*When In Rome* features a Gaddian Commendatore Valdarena.) There is, however, a fairly straightforward reason that Don Corpi could not have represented this church: since 1667 the priests attending the basilica of San Clemente have been Irish Dominicans. This is

⁴⁶ Much of the information on the basilica is to be found on the official Augustinian website (Monica Morbidelli, *Santi Quattro Coronati*, 1999, Altair 4 Multimedia, Available: http://www.santiquattrocoronati.org/index_itie.htm).

enough to make it reasonable for Liliana to walk past this church on the way to her Santi Quattro.

Beyond this, a logical textual motive for the choice of Quattro Santi might be Liliana's attraction to the personality of Don Corpi – of which we shall say more in a moment – or perhaps the Roman, diocesan church he represented. Roman and diocesan, because some of the churches in this area are in an unusual position so far as the clergy serving them are concerned: they are not served by diocesan priests from Rome, but by priests of various religious orders. This is, of course, a fairly common occurrence in the Eternal City. Of the churches I listed above, Sant'Anna, Sant'Antonio di Padova, San Clemente and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme all have priests from various religious orders. Should Liliana wish to see diocesan, Roman priests, she could of course visit the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, but in that case she would, however, be unlikely to receive attention from the parish priest in the way she does from Don Lorenzo Corpi, the official head of San Giovanni being at the time of the novel a certain Achille Ratti and therefore Pope Pius XI. And so we come to her personal connection with a priest, that Don Corpi who Gadda wants us to see as a potential father through the eyes of Liliana. A parish priest would be a man of

some standing, someone who has moved through the system of seminaries, parish life and church politics. There are a great many more priests in Rome than in most other dioceses, so it is not a matter of course that the honour would be laid at the priestly feet after a predetermined number of years service, for example. A parish priest can be expected to be an able and wise character, deserving of the trust of his parishioners. The parish priest of an ancient basilica like Santi Quattro would have had to have been an exceptional man, especially one as (relatively) youthful as Don Corpi. Santi Quattro had significance for important people: a *titulus* of the basilica was Pope Benedict XV, the predecessor of the above-mentioned Pius XI. Unfortunately, Liliana's parish and her parish priest are in an even more unusual situation than the churches of the religious orders we have already seen: the basilica has been since 1564 the home of Augustinian nuns: no priests. Not one priest since, in fact, the 14th century has called the Santi Quattro Coronati his parish. Don Corpi, in this case, has far more power as a "father-figure" in the novel, precisely because he is not in any sense historical: he is a pure creation of Gadda's, and therefore deserves to be read very carefully in terms of the dynamic that is set up between the church and former orphanage, the myth of Pope Joan and her absent impregnator and the childless Liliana, as we will explore below.

Santi Quattro Coronati, its architecture and frescos, and its little cloister on the north side are now very well known and documented. The process of re-examining this monument of ancient Christianity was begun when the aforementioned Giacomo della Chiesa (Benedict XV) became *titulus* and was led by Antonio Muñoz, the Fine Arts Superintendent of the period (the years leading up to the First World War), the work leading to the discovery of some frescos that had been lost since mediaeval times. All this has meant that the basilica now has a special status amongst the churches of Rome and a committed restoration project, with the funds coming from the J. Paul Getty Program and Sparaco Spartaco. Still more intriguing is the special place the church used to have in times of papal elections. The church used to be one that was passed as the newly elected Pope made his way from the Vatican to take up his cathedra in San Giovanni in Laterano. This practice ended with the increase of traffic in the city sometime soon after 1140, with the wider via Labicana (as now) being preferred. This little fact is identified by the scholar Alain Boureau as a central pivot for the myth of Pope Joan, who was said to have given birth in the narrow streets around Santi Quattro during a cavalcade, causing her successors to shun it ever after.

It is interesting to learn that the church that Liliana frequents should be thus associated with childbirth, especially when we regard the fatherly potential of the (equally mythical) Don Corpi for our heroine. If Boureau is right, this whole area of Rome is stuffed with the popular folklore of childbirth, for we have adjacent the hospital and the curious Roman artefact that has appeared in urban legend for centuries: the porphyry “birthing chair” of the Lateran Palace. Even today, when the elections of popes can hardly be seen as in any sense secretive – apart from the voting, of course – there are those who give credence to the ridiculous story that, following the election of Joan, popes are tested to show their masculinity. The story that pope is carried, having removed his underwear and with his male parts showing through the circular hole in the porphyry throne, over the heads of the cardinals, who dutifully proclaim “*Testiculos habit et bene pendent*” is believed and repeated to this day.⁴⁷ Where the time in the busy schedule of investiture comes for the pope to be examined by a college of the clergy’s finest is unclear. This further link to illicit sexuality is most interesting to read in the light of Liliana’s lack of sexual fulfilment. We are tempted to read Don Lorenzo now, linked by history

⁴⁷ A recent example in popular culture is the writer and former politician Gyles Brandreth’s comments on the television programme *Q.I.* (Lorimer 2003). A transcript of the episode can be consulted at <http://sites.google.com/site/qitranscripts/transcripts/1x05>

(Benedict XV) and legend (Pope Joan and the porphyry throne) to a para-sacerdotal sexuality, as just the Ideal Father that Liliana believes he could be.

Does Gadda not tell us as much himself?

Don Lorenzo, sì: nonostante la veste nera, nonostante l'incompatibilità dei due sacramenti ... divergenti. Anche in don Lorenzo. Che doveva essere una discreta torre, sto mulo. Per lo meno la δύναμις del padre doveva avercela.

(QP RR II 22)

Don Lorenzo, despite his black cassock, despite the sacramental incompatibility, of the two sacraments which were – divergent. Even Don Lorenzo. Who must have been a tower of strength, that mule. At least he must have had the δύναμις [dynamis] of a father.

(AM 14)

Don Corpi, therefore, is fulfilling a role analogous – but crucially, not identical – to that which we have seen for San Giorgio: he is the preferred – unattainable, unsuitable, inappropriate but preferred – suitor of the woman. Liliana's unspoken, taboo attraction to him as the perfect father for her children, his criticism of her husband, all become deeply suspicious when we recognise his importance to the composition of the novel and, as we have already noted, his completely fictional origins. In this respect, he may even come under suspicion in the terms of the central crime of the novel, as yet another one of the quanta that make up the possible causes of Liliana's death.

There is still more to the Santi Quattro. From the year 1564 until the late part of the nineteenth century the church served as the location of a special service to the local community, run by the aforementioned Augustinian sisters. The Santi Quattro Coronati complex was not just cloister and basilica but also an orphanage. Thus, perhaps this is the very location that Gadda had in mind when he had Liliana take in her charges. Ines, Virginia and the lucky Ginetta might not literally have been taken from the care of “suore”, but the historical reality from which the text is generated is apparent. This fact also allows us to connect back with 219 via Merulana because of the location of a school – run by the nuns and nowadays a state Primary School – round the corner from 219 on via Poliziano.⁴⁸

The building itself offers some items of interest to the reader. It is Romanesque in design (a feature that is fairly unusual in Rome, and unique in this area), and houses not only the chapel itself, but a cloister and a squareish courtyard that reminds one rather of a castle’s keep. It is difficult to quantify the impression that such a structure makes on different people, but it is perhaps not too outlandish to suggest that there is a womb-like, protective feel to the courtyard.

⁴⁸ In the text, of course, the school that Gina attends is Sacro Cuore (QP RR II 30).

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Gadda considered the structure to be of importance in itself: the sensations and feelings that it generates in the individual need not be dismissed out of hand.

Gadda's decision to have the action of the novel played out in the locations of via Merulana and the Castelli Romani means that he is able to use the religious topography of these places as more than just settings, but as supertexts by which we may further understand the novel. In my catalogue of references which I have already discussed in chapter 2 of this part of the thesis, I stated that I had purposefully steered away from cataloguing references to churches when they were used purely as geographical indicators. It will be worth our while to enumerate those geographical indicators, in order that I join up the statements made in chapter 2 with those above.

In the course of *Quer pasticciaccio*, Gadda mentions the following churches:⁴⁹ (Chapter One) San Martino ai Monti (QP RR II 18), Sant'Agnese in Agone, Santa Maria in Porta Paradisi (QP RR II 20), Santi Quattro Coronati (QP RR II 22), San Giovanni in Laterano (QP RR II 27), San Luigi de' Francesi, Santa Maria sopra

⁴⁹ The page references that follow are the first on which each church is mentioned.

Minerva (QP RR II 41), Sant'Agostino, Santa Maria in Aquiro, Santa Chiara, The Pantheon (Tutti Santi) (QP RR II 41), il Gesù (QP RR II 43), Sant'Antonio di Padova, San Clemente, San Lorenzo in Lucina, San Silvestro (QP RR II 52), Santo Stefano Rotondo, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (QP RR II 53); (Chapter Two) San Lorenzo (in Florence) (QP RR II 59); (Chapter Three) Sant'Anna (near the Vatican) (QP RR II 73), Sant'Andrea della Valle (QP RR II 77); (Chapter Four) San Francesco (in Zagarolo) (QP RR II 101); (Chapter Five) San Lorenzo al Verano (QP RR II 128) Santa Maria Novella (Florence) (QP RR II 132)⁵⁰, Santa Maria Maggiore (QP RR II 133); (Chapter Seven)⁵¹ San Paolo della Croce (QP RR II 163), Santa Maria in Dòmnicà (QP RR II 163), Santa Maria ai Frari (Venice) (QP RR II 173), San Carlo (QP RR II 181); (Chapter Eight) Santa Maria in Abitacolo (QP RR II 188)⁵², San Paolo fuori le mura (QP RR II 191); Chapters Nine and Ten see no new churches mentioned. There are therefore thirty-one different churches mentioned in the novel, and there are fifty separate references to church buildings.⁵³ Of these, we are taken inside none in the final draft of the novel, although Gadda planned scenes in Santi Quattro and San

⁵⁰ A deliberate mistake here sees the church attributed to Bologna, rather than Florence.

⁵¹ There are no new churches mentioned in Chapter Six.

⁵² This Church is mentioned in later passages as Santa Rita Invitacolo and as Santa Rita in Vitacolo.

⁵³ It should also be remembered that, although it is not included here, the *questura* is referred to normally either as Santo Stefano or as Collegio Romano, as it shares the same square as Rome's main seminary for diocesan priests.

Luigi de' Francesi in his screenplay, *Il palazzo degli ori*. They are therefore somewhat removed from a liturgical setting, they play no part as locations for scenes of religious devotion.⁵⁴ They are landmarks, ways of finding one's way around Rome.

4: 2 In and Out of Rome

Having said that the churches are mostly used as markers in space and time, it is clear that we are supposed to think about them as affecting the novel's main characters. In fact, there is a strong connection between the characters, the locations they find themselves in, and their role in the novel. We might note that the victims of the two crimes, for example, are church-goers in an unusual way: Liliana is devoted to the Santi Quattro, as we have seen, but one of the first anecdotes given us about Menegazzi is that, on losing her topaz ring, she goes to San Silvestro (across the via del Corso, a five minute walk) to light a candle before going back to look for it. Others affected by the crimes have similar connections to Rome's churches spelt out: Remo was baptized, we hear almost as soon as we learn his name, in the church of San Martino ai Monti, just around the corner from via Merulana; Menegazzi's housekeeper is also a devotee of

⁵⁴ Except for the caveat mentioned above regarding Ingravallo's last look at Santa Maria Maggiore in Chapter 10.

Santi Quattro; Angeloni's orbit is bound in by the churches of the Campo Marzio and so on. The whole of the cast assembled at via Merulana, 219, in fact, seems to be conditioned by their proximity to churches: even the street itself is more than once referred to as a thoroughfare connecting Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni Laterano. The inhabitants of the palazzo dei pescicani are united in this, and in a shared kind of "victimhood".

This "victimhood" is to be understood in an ironic sense – Lilitana is, after all, the heiress of a war profiteer – but also in a real sense as well: Lilitana and Teresa Menegazzi both suffer the indignity of both crime and the investigation of the crime in their own personal space. In this sense, their "victimhood" is set against the other two groupings of characters in the novel: the investigators and those from outside Rome. If we divide the characters into three groups: the Merulanese, the Investigators and the Outsiders, we can see how each is dealt with in terms of religious topography. We have already spoken of the first group, in the previous section. In the second case, there are few geographical references to churches: even when lo Sgrafia's expertise in wheedling out information is expressed, there are extended references to streets, zones, piazzas – but no churches, just where we may have expected to find them. And yet the

investigators come from ‘Santo Stefano del Cacco’ or from the “Collegio Romano”, or even from “San Giovanni”, they eat on “via der Gesù” (QP RR II 161): all locations that recall, in their nomenclature, churches. It might be said that in this respect they resemble the Merulanese, but there is a clear distinction that Gadda has set up in the difference between these geographical references: the churches here point to streets, directions, other buildings beside the cathedrals and chapels. This second group lives at one further remove from the religious significance of the buildings.

The third group, those outside Rome, have even less to do with the Christian geography of the city. Ines, for example, cannot remember – or will not say – the name of Santo Stefano Rotondo; in the hills around Marino, only one church is mentioned, and it is mentioned three times, the name different on each occasion.

When we also take the names of the male characters who make up the third group (Diomede, Enea, Ascanio: names easily associated with Homer and, especially, Virgil), we realize that the lack of reference to churches and church buildings associated with them is not merely because they are outside of the city

and outside of the Christian morality of the city: they pre-date it, come before it. Even the location of Due Santi at Le Frattocchie is telling: this was the original site of the Vestal flame, the ancestral home of the gens iulia. This is the scene of Nisus' Choice in book nine of the Aeneid (Bleisch). The via Sacra of the Roman Forum does not in fact run to this spot, twenty kilometres outside Rome: it runs *from* here. This is Bovilliae, the original settlement from which Rome started as a satellite. It is here that Aeneas met the Latin kings, here that the sacred fire was lit.⁵⁵ The Diomedes, Eneas and Ascanios are the representatives of that original settlement, the pre-Christian Rome.⁵⁶ Hence they are able to claim a certain right of primogeniture over the recent interlopers: the theft and the murder are the ways in which their loss of prestige is adjusted.

The message, however, also reaches forward in time, to the years in which the novel is set, to the Fascism of the 1920s and 30s. Diomede, as well as being "uno

⁵⁵ For further information on the significance of the area for Virgil and the Romans, see Pamela R. Bleisch, "Nisus' Choice: Bovillae at Aeneid 9.387–8" *The Classical Quarterly* 51 (2001) and Lorenzo Quilici, *La via Appia da Roma a Bovillae* (Rome: Italia Nostra, 1976). From the perspective of the classics, Thomas Ashby, "Alba Longa" in *Journal of Philology* 27.53 (1899). On the subject of Bovillae as the origin of Roman society, see Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

⁵⁶ A different, yet harmonising, interpretation is given by Sbragia. He sees the blond-haired Lanciani as "fitting proof [...] for the regime's later assertion of the splendid Aryanism of the Latin and Sabellian people." This, for Sbragia, is another of Gadda's satires on Fascism: "Nevertheless, the promise of future Roman progeny is hindered by the lack of an inseminating force able to match the ferocity of the female sexuality, a slap in the face of the myth of the Roman patriarchy." (Sbragia 1997 150)

da rappresentare in bellezza il Lazio e la sua gioventù, al Foro Italico” (QP RR II 167) (see note 63), is a seducer of women in kind with – at least in Gadda/Ingravallo’s imagining – Mussolini himself. The retelling of the foundation myths of Rome under Fascism necessarily involved the hinterland, with the draining of the Pontine marshes in 1928 – planned as the novel is taking place in 1927 – as important to the myth of fascist Rome as it was to a humanitarian project for the sake of public health. For Gadda, an anti-fascist of the Right – as he was by the time *Quer pasticciaccio* was completed, whatever his history – the regression of the moral code of Italian society is to be regretted. Even if Gadda, with Don Ciccio, has no time for the core beliefs of Christianity, no patience for the Eucharist, the Communion of Saints or the Virgin Birth, there is patent dismay that Mussolini’s Italy has gone back, not to the Golden Age of the Roman Republic as Gadda perhaps had hoped, but to the cult of the Big Man, the tribal, the pre-Roman morality that is represented by those from beyond the walls.

At the same time, there is no real condemnation of the characters from Le Frattocchie: they are acting as they are because they have no other frame of reference. There is even sympathy for their situation, their struggles against the

authority of the police forces, most noticeable in the case of Ines, perhaps. The judgement of Cacòpardo is insightful, but incomplete: “non c’è differenza – pensa Don Ciccio – tra la borghesia di via Merulana e il proletariato dei Castelli Romani” (Cacòpardo 71) [there is no difference – thinks Don Ciccio – between the gentry of via Merulana and the proletariat of Castelli Romani]. Cacòpardo, is, of course, correct in the sense that for the investigator there is no difference in the level of guilt applicable to both parties: both, as we have seen, have some right to consider their space invaded, their birthright challenged. But there is a clear distinction that is found precisely in terms of location, of situation. The *proletariato dei Castelli Romani* are excluded from the religious topography of Rome. It is not simply that they represent a debasement of Italic culture in some vague way: they have been left behind, they have no other way of acting. In fact, they may even be the evidence of the higher origins of the Roman people. Were it not for the squalor of the scenes set around Marino, the temptation to glamorise the proactive, *übermenschlich* qualities of the Outsiders would be irresistible. Yet Gadda manages to walk this tightrope between condemnation and sympathy for the devil with typical skill.

The devil is the right character to invoke here, as the Christian references in the scenes outside Rome give way to diabolic scenes. What is Zamira, after all, if not the Don Corpi of Due Santi? With her stores of advice, magical potions, secret words, the *aranciata* and the pecorino taking the place of the wine and bread, or the Blood and Body, if we prefer. There is the devil in the form of a chicken at Divino Amore as well: but it is too simple to say that we are dealing with Satan (Ha-Satan, the adversary) here. Rather, this is a pagan deity, a memory perhaps of the cultic god of a pre-Roman tribe, a throwback in itself no less important than the Christian God – rejected, He too, by Gadda – but out of place, out of time.

If there were world enough, and time, it would be interesting to see how Gadda's feelings about the pre-Roman – in the double sense of before Imperial Rome and before Papal Rome – would mesh with his love-hate relationship with Fascism.⁵⁷ In Gadda, there is a strong inclination to prefer the original, the unique, the unusual, the chaotic that is constantly clashing with his equally strong desire for order, symmetry, authority. His metaphor of the northern Italian Celt, terrified and attracted by the irresistible power of the dactyls of

⁵⁷ Cfr Sbragia 2004

Latin (“*militem, ordinem, cardinem consulem*” AG 89) is a wonderful one for bringing us closer to an understanding of his thinking, and may provide a springboard for further investigation.⁵⁸ For the moment, we have to be content to say that this rich seam of ideas, new readings and challenges is opened by our understanding of the religious references and Christian topography that Gadda provides us with. This shaft will provide us with still more fuel if we consider one of the extended uses of Christian imagery in Gadda’s texts: his predilection for sacred art. That will follow in the next chapter.

⁵⁸ An interesting parallel with Gadda in terms of his career and origin is the Romano-Celt Caecilius Statius (c.220 BC – c. 166 BC). See Marcus Tullius Cicero and D. H. Berry, *Defence Speeches*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Cornelia Willemina Ooms, *Studies on the language of Caecilius Statius*, 3 vols. (Ann Arbor: University Microforms International, 1977) and Katherine A. Geffcken, *Comedy in the Pro Caelio: with an appendix on the In Clodium et curionem* (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1995) for his comic abilities, and Guy Edward Farquhar Chilver, *Cisalpine Gaul. Social and Economic History from 49 B.C. to the Death of Trajan*. (Oxford, 1941), Jean Jacques Hatt and James Hogarth, *Celts and Gallo-Romans, Ancient Civilizations* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), J. H. C. Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon : Romans and Gauls in Republican Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) for his background as a northern Italian Gaul after Telemon (225 BC).

5: Religious Art

In this chapter I intend to give the reader some guidance in terms of the incidence of references to religious art in the novel *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, and to explore the relationship that Gadda suggests between the character of Commendatore Angeloni and the artist Caravaggio. There then follows a more general discussion of Gadda's use of colour and how this might be used to link the painterly process via a short treatment of gemstones (a perennial favourite topic of Gadda the artist and Gadda the scientist) to the second part of the thesis. While it might be readily admitted that the appreciation of art that has at its core some religious intention or message does not require any religious devotion, or even knowledge, on the part of a twentieth century observer, I believe that through the work we have been through on religious culture, intertexts and the lives of the saints up to this point, we may consider Gadda to be part of a group of informed spectators, appreciative of the messages inherent in the works that are mentioned.

That is not to say that Gadda's focus when using these works of art as intertexts is religious: his interest is in the art works themselves, and to a lesser extent, the

biographies of the artists.⁵⁹ But we ignore the religious messages at the price of our comprehension, as only by taking Gadda's vast knowledge into consideration can we be fully appreciative of his work, as scholars such as Raimondi (1995, 2000, 2003) have made abundantly clear.

5: 1 Examples of Religious Art

We have already had cause to mention Gadda's use of works of art by Giorgione, Bernini and Michelangelo in his texts. Certainly, it seems that this is an important part of his culture's tradition for him, and whether we are in the presence of the Madonna of Castelfranco or an imagined St Christopher, Gadda will draw our attention to the existence of such artefacts, or create them for his own purposes. In this section, I will endeavour to provide the reader with examples of Christian sacred art that Gadda makes reference to in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, and to say what significance these references may have to the text, attempting as before to excavate another layer in Gadda's art.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Although we must be aware that biography was always interesting to Gadda: there are a large number of biographies in his library, and he seemed to take delight in enumerating biographical detail in his writing, for example in *I Luigi di Francia* (1964).

⁶⁰ I am not a history of art scholar, and there is every chance that there may be another oblique reference to a painting or work of sculpture that I have not recognised in the novel. That said, I am confident that here are listed the works that Gadda refers to directly in the course of the book. It is also worth noting the oblique references to Caravaggio's canvases in the Contarelli chapel of San Luigi de' Francesi in Rome, but these will be dealt with in the section (1.5.2) below.

The Tondo Doni

(now in the Uffizi Galleries, Florence)

Il metatarso di San Giuseppe s'è peduncolato di inimitabile alluce del tondo michelangiolo della Palatina (Sacra Famiglia): il qual ditone, per una porzione minima invero, ha tegumento pittorico dal ditoncello della Sposa [...] (QP RR II 197)

The metatarsus of Saint Joseph has been peduncled with an inimitable big toe in the Palatine *tondo* by Michelangelo (the Holy Family): which large digit, for a minimal portion, to tell the truth, has its pictorial tegument from the little toe of the Bride [...] (AM 273)



Saint Joseph's metatarsal, so insistently referred to by Gadda, is not perhaps the notable feature of the Tondo Doni. The art historian will perhaps see the first traces of mannerism in the twisted, stretched body of Our Lady; the

critic may note her masculine features; another scholar might be puzzled by the naked figures in the background. Yet, as Pedriali notes in the 2007 monograph

“Cain and Other Symmetries (The Early Alternatives)” (this is from part three: “Holy Symmetry (Saints and Toes)”), this reference, with the toe, the pun on light (la luce, l’alluce) and the proximity to the Blessed Virgin – it is the only visible point of contact between the mother and father of the Holy Family – is full of meaning for Gadda.

The alternative art history that is written out of this three-way association (alluce-luce-madre) ridicules, of course, “l’Idea-Pollice” (chastity) of the Sacra Famiglia and the Sacri Sponsali, as painted by Michelangelo (Tondo Doni) and by Raphael (Sposalizio della Vergine) [...] Having denounced all creative urge from artistic to divine as mere biology, the climactic argument deflates *bucinando* – i.e. befouling creator and creation in the pseudo-archaic manner of *Il primo libro delle Favole*.
(Pedriali 2007)

Even here, in the depiction of the Holy Family, we are to read “mere biology”. It is all in the tegument of the toes.⁶¹ This pseudo-penetration is perhaps to be read humorously in the context of what we have already said (above, p 50) about the rivalry between Peter and Paul, between Polizia and Carabinieri, between Ingravallo and his “replacement” Pestalozzi, but a more convincing reading in terms of the novel comes to us in terms of an interpretation of the

⁶¹ The – seemingly ancient – association of feet with the genitals has recently been examined by the neurologist V. S. Ramachandran, who postulates the possibility of “crosstalk” between the brain area that controls the genitals and the adjacent area that is responsible for the feet (V. S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind*. London: Fourth Estate, 1998 104)

Christian scene here represented. Surely the use of the most famous family in Christianity should bring to mind the failed family of Liliana and Remo Balducci. The movement apparent in the *tondo* – is the Child being passed to Mary, or taken from her? – reminds us of the role that Remo plays in the series of temporary adoptions (“Balducci aveva assunto, verso la Gina, un contegno paterno ... proprio come un buon papà” QP RR II 20) [Balducci had assumed, towards Gina, a paternal manner (AM 10)], and of the transitory nature of these episodes. More than anything, however, Gadda’s insistence on the toes, on the implied intimacy, on his scepticism regarding “il miracolo, o meglio l’audicolo, della castità virile” (QP RR II 197) [“the miracle, or rather the audicle, of male chastity” (AM 273)], forces us to re-evaluate Remo Balducci, his confession that ““semo ommini. Se viaggia ... Un quarche capricetto extra: se sa...” (QP RR II 97) [“a man’s only human. When you travel all the time ... A little something extra here and there, of course...” (AM 126)], that “capricetto” which in itself recalls his first incarnation in the novel as “caprone” (QP RR II 18), Ingravallo’s suspicion that Remo “non avesse valutato, non avesse penetrato tutta la bellezza di lei [Liliana.]” (QP RR II 21). In this reading, of course, Liliana fulfills the role that her name implies, that of the Virgin Mary, assumed into heaven, she becomes for us as she is already for the nuns who are sure she’s already in

Heaven, for Virginia: “Sora mia bella Liliana, voi site ‘a Madonna pe mme!” (QP RR II 137). The husband and wife take on the role of the mother and father in the Holy Family, with a parallel, and somewhat odd, arrangement in terms of “adoptive” children. This time, however, our “Joseph” is a philanderer, his “toe” making contact where it shouldn’t be.

Aurora

(Lorenzo de Medici’s funerary monument in the church of San Lorenzo, Florence.)



Quella riga, il segno carnale del mistero ... quella che Michelangelo (don Ciccio ne rivide la fatica, a San Lorenzo) aveva creduto opportuno di dover omettere. Pignolerie! Lassa perdere! (QP RR II 59)

That central line, the carnal mark of the mystery ... the one that Michelangelo (Don Ciccio mentally saw again his great work, at San Lorenzo) had thought it wisest to omit. Details! Skip it! (AM 68)

The reference that Gadda makes here is a confusing one, if one is not used to the Gaddian sense of humour. Literally, the description – or rather, the non-description – is of the murdered woman’s crotch. Humour is generated by the reference to Aurora, who is – intentionally

– incomplete in this regard. However, by applying Don Ciccio's artistic knowledge, Gadda opens to us another world of character psychology: the reference to Aurora – Dawn – leads us to a promise of rebirth, a death that is only for this world. On another level, Liliana is as beautiful and as cold and as lifeless – in life as in death, in fact – as a marble statue. Or perhaps we are being encouraged to see and not see Liliana in terms of sexual potential: Ingravallo looks, seeks out her sex, but at the same time thinks of Michelangelo's sculpture, and in so doing denies the possibility of coupling.

Beyond the level of characterisation, the comparison that Gadda is making between himself and Michelangelo is humorous and multi-faceted. On the one hand hyperbolic – Gadda probably did not consider himself seriously as the rival in art of Buonarroti – and on the other self-deprecating: Gadda feigns delicacy in this passage, a kind of “here my Muse her wing maun cour”.⁶² At the same time, of course, Gadda is claiming an ironic kinship with Michelangelo, poking fun at the two of them – and perhaps Don Ciccio as well – and their prudishness before the “segno carnale”.

⁶² Robert Burns “Tam O’ Shanter” l.179.

This is again an example of Gadda's lightness of touch, an attribute seldom acknowledged in the Great Lombard's prose. In a tiny reference, itself deflated by the "Lassa perdere!" that closes the paragraph, Gadda opens up for us the psychology of a central character and shares with us an auto-exegesis joke. It also pushes us forwards, towards the very last paragraph of the novel, and the particularly striking image of "quella piega nera verticale tra i due sopraccigli dell'ira, nel volto bianchissimo della ragazza" (QP RR II 276) The girl in question is, of course, Assunta, but the "piega nera" has excited much comment.⁶³ Pedullà remarks that "nulla in Gadda rimane pelle pelle. Tina porta in fronte un segno superficiale e insieme profondo" (Pedullà 237) [nothing in Gadda is less than what it seems. Tina carries on her forehead a sign that is at the same time superficial and profound.] The "piega nera" is to be read, according to Pedullà and others, as the female genitals, and here I must differ slightly from Sbragia's reading of the piece, when he claims, "it is a sign that the novel, unlike Michelangelo, does not omit." (Sbragia 1997 156) It is precisely in the omission that the power of the sign resides: Ingravallo's attempts to repress the erotic transports forward and backwards within the novel, to the arrest of Assunta as well as the lunch on the 20th of February. We are left to consider that

⁶³ In particular, see the decisive reading in chapter four of Maurizio De Benedictis, *La piega nera: groviglio stilistico ed enigma della femminilità in C.E. Gadda*, L'Arco muto (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991).

this sign is a transposed, or rather translated sign: does it come from the lack of such a sign, such a *pignoleria*, in the representation of Liliana's dead body? The representation of Liliana Balducci is as a sterile, cold, marble statue, however beautifully rendered. In fact these little "details" are what makes her special, what gives her her powers: contrast her "whiteness" with the "black fold" on Tina's forehead – what a place to display it! Liliana's childlessness and Ingravallo's idealization of her sexuality are ideally represented by Gadda's gloss on the "Aurora", and with it and the movement it causes in the reading of the novel, Gadda gives his strongest clue to the identity of the murderess.

I have already mentioned humour in this short section, and I think that it is important to keep that in mind when we consider such details as these. This reference serves an ironic function: at least one of the objectives is to cause the reader to smile, whether at the prudishness of Gadda, his overblown identification with Michelangelo or Don Ciccio's inability to function correctly. Beneath the humour, however, is a deepening of the plot, a linking of two similarly disparate scenes of the novel.

The Cappella Niccolina, the *Stanze Vaticane*, the Sistine Chapel, The Assumption

... “com’è vestuta la Madonna, com’è bella: com’è bello San Gennaro nuosto, pur’isso [...] ‘A cappella d’ o’ Beato Angelico! ‘E stanze Raffaello! L’affreschi d’ ‘o Pinturicchio! [...] L’Assunta [...] di Tiziano Vecellio! [...] ‘O ritratto d’ ‘a Madonna spaccato! co chilli sette angede ‘e ceralacca ncoppa ‘a capa!...” (QP RR II 173)

... “how the Madonna is dressed up, how pretty she is: how handsome San Gennaro is, too [...] The Beato Angelico Chapel! The Raphael rooms! The frescos of Pinturicchio! [...] The Assumption of the Virgin [...] by Titian, Tiziano Vecellio! [...] The portrait of the Madonna – the spit and image – with those seven wax angels over her head...” (AM 238-9)



During the second interrogation of Ines, Fumi is stung into a rant about the young women who come to Italy to see the county’s art treasures. He references more than one artist and more than one work, but all fit into the category of “religious art”.⁶⁴ Raphael will come up again, in reference to his “Sposalizio della Vergine”, and Titian has already

been invoked to describe Contessa Menegazzi. Gadda goes on to pun on the name of Pinturicchio – the Little Painter – and Beato Angelico is mentioned at

⁶⁴ It is true that not all the works in the Raphael Rooms in the Vatican Museums are of religious scenes, but many are, and in any case their situation and their patron (Giuliano della Rovere, Julius II) can be taken into account and placed in this category.

least partly to tie in with Diomede, blond as an angel himself. What is particularly interesting about these references is the tone in which they are made: Doctor Fumi's little speech about the "art students" visiting Italy is a third example of a type, associating Christian art with sex. As he goes on to say "'Che stanze! [...] Che Ppinturricchio! Le stanze che vuonno chille è n'ata, Pompè! na stanza che vui ll'avit'a cercà tutta la notte! [...] Pure 'o Pinturicchio ... è n'ato...'" (QP RR II 174) ["'Rooms! [...] Pinturicchio! The room they're after is another kind, Pompeo, and you have to hunt for that room, if it takes all night! [...] And the Pinturicchio they want ... is another man, too...'" (AM 240)]. Following on from the questions raised by the touching toes in the "Tondo Doni" and the denial/admission of sexual possibility in the "Aurora", here there is an implication that the sacred art tradition is for some (at best) an excuse for having sex or (at worst) a catalyst in the process. The second of these possibilities seems to me to be particularly interesting: while Fumi is implying that the "girls [who] land at the Immacolatella, a hundred and fifty at a time" (AM 237) are prepared to be up to no good straight off, it is perhaps seeing the beauty of the Madonna or of San Gennaro that makes them go in search of their own "Little Painter". Gadda may be suggesting that the beauty of the art causes a loosening of the moral fibre, a crack to form in the chastity of the young

women. Like Francesca in *Inferno* V, they may complain that they have been led astray by art – painting, this time, rather than the word.

Saint Teresa of Avila in Ecstasy

(in Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.)



Era molto bella, a rimirla, [...] con tumidi, rossi labbri: quasi un silfide bambina, ma precocemente infastidita dalla pubertà [...] e dogliosa di volumi (un po' alla maniera di certe Sante, di certe monache ritenute spagnole)[.] (QP RR II 146)

She was very beautiful, to gaze upon, [...] with swollen red lips: like a baby sylph, precociously troubled with puberty [...] pained by certain weights (a little in the manner of some saints, some nuns, believed to be Spanish)[.] (AM 199)

Ma la contessa Circia ebriaca arrovesciava il capo all'indietro [...]: la fenditura della bocca, quale in un salvadanaio di coccio, s'inarcava sguaiata fino a potersi appuntare agli orecchi, le spaccava il volto come un cocomero dopo la prima incisione, in due [...] sottosuole di ciabatta: e dagli occhioni strabuzzati, che gli si vede il bianco di sotto a l'iridi come d'una Teresa riposseduta dal demonio, le gocciolavano giù per volto lacrime etiliche[.] (QP RR II 194)

But the Contessa Circea, drunken, threw her head back [...] : the cleft of her mouth, like an earthenware piggy-bank, arched, open and vulgar, till it could touch her ears, splitting the face in two like a watermelon after the first incision, in two slippers [...] : and from her

rolling eyes, where you could see the white below the iris like that of a Teresa repossessed by the devil, down her face dripped ethylic tears[.] (AM 268)

Bernini's famous representation of the mystic and reformer of the Carmelite order, Saint Teresa of Avila has drawn much attention over the three hundred and fifty years of its life, but especially in the last fifty or so. Jacques Lacan, in his seminar on feminine sexuality, summed up the modern experience of the work: "you only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming, there is no doubt about it." (Lacan 70-71). Although there are many art critics who dismiss this interpretation as irreligious, disrespectful or crude, it is backed up in part by Saint Teresa's own autobiographical account of her mystic experience.⁶⁵ Other commentators have sought to "blame" Bernini for the sexual overtones of the piece (Harbison proposes that Bernini's great rival, Borromini "is closer to St. Teresa than Bernini is" precisely because Borromini is "pure while Bernini is impure"

⁶⁵ "Beside me on the left appeared an angel in bodily form . . . He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest ranks of angels, who seem to be all on fire . . . In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one can not possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it -- even a considerable share." (St Teresa ch 29).

Harbison 68). Whatever the eventual consensus of art historians, Gadda's independence of mind allows him to draw his own conclusions. He goes by what he sees, and uses the statue to punctuate two of the most straightforwardly erotic moments of *Quer pasticciaccio*: the vulnerable Ines brought before the interrogation of the male gaze; and the confused, sexually rampant dream of Sergeant Pestalozzi.

So far in this section, we have been interested in how Gadda manipulates the religious art references in order that they refer us to thoughts of human sexuality: paradoxically, it would seem. Yet in this statue, the two concepts – normally kept so distant – are brought together. Teresa's ecstasy is a mystical and religious experience that does not ignore the body, but celebrates it. Her vision does not compromise her chastity, her sacred virginity, but confirms it. The deepest expressions of Christianity have always recognised the powerful combination of body and spirit and Christian mysticism is, in particular, a strong repository of such a philosophy. The Evening Prayer on a Sunday – a particularly solemn service – uses such imagery, borrowing from the book of the Apocalypse (19: 5-7): "The Marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready". Gadda is aware of this. He uses the image of Saint Teresa

because he is aware that her experience as depicted by Bernini is physical: the outward sign, perhaps, of the sacred mystery. In the end, he is as far from prudishness as he is from Christian mysticism.

In addition to any specific religious significance that these works might hold, Gadda has chosen them and used them in a way that creates another level of meaning. In choosing these illustrations, Gadda is more than hinting at a bodily, sexual side to the religious messages contained therein. Human biology is implicit in the very existence of sacred art, in its creation and in its appreciation. They are not merely static images in the text, however: they generate information about characters and drive the plot forward. In the detective novel where anything might count, we are invited to transgressively read sex into the religious art that Gadda is showing us.

5: 2 Caravaggio and Angeloni

Of all the artists that populate the literary world that Gadda creates, Caravaggio is perhaps the most often noted.⁶⁶ In the case of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via*

⁶⁶ See Meriel Baines, "Elements of Caravaggio in Gadda's Prose," *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* 2001.1 (2001), Giorgio Pinotti, "Il bacio di Giove," *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* 2007.6 (2007), Ezio Raimondi, "Gadda e le incidenze lombarde della luce," *The Edinburgh Journal*

Merulana, Caravaggio has a central role to play, as we will see, but perhaps we can look beyond a simple cataloguing of his appearances to what this artist might have meant to the novelist.

Gadda has more than a passing interest in the artist, born Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio near Milan in 1571. Caravaggio is frequently referenced in his writing, and he owned scholarly books on his life and work, among these a popular volume by Valerio Mariani entitled *Il Caravaggio* from the “L’arte per tutti” series, published by Istituto Nazionale “L.U.C.E.” (Roma: 1930); Roberto Longhi’s catalogue for a 1951 exhibition *del Caravaggio e dei caravaggeschi*;⁶⁷ and the translation of Bernard Berenson’s *Caravaggio, His Incongruity and His Fame*, one of the first monograph-length studies on Caravaggio. Berenson’s in particular was a globally influential book on Caravaggio from one of the major

of *Gadda Studies* 2000.0 (2000), this last being an extract from the book *Il colore eloquente*. Bologna: Mulino, 1995. Raimondi has also written the monograph – or rather, collection of lectures – *Barocco moderno: Roberto Longhi e Carlo Emilio Gadda*. Milan: Mondadori, 2003. Caravaggio is another artist known in some circles as “il gran Lombardo”: Mascherpa, Giorgio. *Caravaggio: il gran Lombardo*. Milan: Camunia, 1995.

⁶⁷ The exhibition was promoted by the Italian president at the time, Einaudi and included important artists such as Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer and Velazqu   among the *caravaggeschi*. Whether this was an indication of the growth in status of Caravaggio, or an attempt to stimulate such a growth is not clear.

art historians of the day, following on from the rediscovery of Caravaggio in the early 1920s by Venturi, Longhi, and Zahn.⁶⁸

Berenson's book has several faults (not least is the mistaking a boy for a girl, page 8), is prudish and confrontational, and contains a surprising omission: Berenson makes no mention of Caravaggio's sexuality. That said, he does deplore the "Crucifixion of St Peter" and other paintings of the same period, saying "it [Crucifixion of St Peter] is degraded to a study of buttocks in a composition of crossed diagonals. Buttocks again in his "Burial of St Lucy" and yet again in the "Madonna of Loretto". Indeed, he seems to have anticipated the sculptors of our day for whom buttocks are the most interesting part of the human body." (Berenson 63) He goes on to attack those who would insert the biographical circumstances of Caravaggio's sexual preferences as "German-minded" (Berenson i), an insult so steeped in his personal conception of the world as to be unintelligible to the modern reader. Berenson says of one of the Caravaggios in San Luigi dei Francesi (the Calling of Saint Matthew): "One may go further and say it looks like the illustration to a detective story. A police

⁶⁸ The earliest books treating Caravaggio as a single subject (as opposed to a member of "artists of the 17th century" for example) date from the 1900s, with Witting's *Michelangelo da Caravaggio* (Strasbourg: 1906) being the earliest that I have discovered. It is still in print today in translation (Felix Witting, *Caravaggio*, Temporis (New York: Parkstone Press, 2007).

magistrate makes an apparition at a gambling-den presided over by a still fine although broken gentleman” (Berenson 17). This is a serendipitous observation for Gadda, for although a cross-fertilisation is unlikely given the compositional history of *Quer pasticciaccio*, this artwork may have provoked the same feeling in Gadda. Indeed, it is in the shape of a fine although broken gentleman that we are introduced to Caravaggio specifically in a detective story: the commendatore Angeloni in *Quer pasticciaccio*.

That said, it is not in the 1957 edition of *Quer pasticciaccio* that we are properly introduced to Angeloni and Caravaggio. Rather, we rely on *Il palazzo degli ori* and on the essay “Il pasticciaccio” to make explicit the oblique references to “San Luigi de’ Francesi” (QP RR II 41) concrete for us. That Angeloni is an admirer of Caravaggio’s is stated in the screenplay as the reason for his frequenting the area around the Campo Marzio area, and the case is made clearer still in Gadda’s essay on the novel, first published in 1958 in *L’Illustrazione Italiana*, later collected as part of *I viaggi, la morte* (VM SGF I 505-514). In this, the Commendatore is quite clearly stated as a “periodico visitatore, in ora chiara, della cappella Contarelli a San Luigi de’ Francesi a la Scrofa, dove le tre tele del Caravaggio sembrano vivere in un tempo sospeso, in un attimo

eterno.” [“visitor, in the daytime, of the Contarelli chapel of the church of San Luigi de' Francesi on via de la Scrofa, where the three canvasses of Caravaggio seems to live in frozen time, in an eternal instant.”] There is more than one way of looking at this. Firstly, we must remember that as a civil servant, this part of Rome is easily within the orbit of Angeloni, and indeed it is a shame to pass Bernini's elephant and the Pantheon without pausing to admire.⁶⁹ Secondly, the use of an artist with the reputation of Caravaggio's can be seen another piece of the jigsaw of allusions leading us to identify the wretched respectable man as a homosexual, if not a paedophile. Thirdly, we may consider that Caravaggio's reputation was still less than assured at the time in which the novel is set: by 1927 there were few outright admirers of the painter amongst modern critics, many seeing him as a kind of sub-Giorgione, even if Gadda himself was already a fan. It was not until Longhi in Italy and the Anglo-American critics – of which Berenson is one – started to write about him that he was catapulted to the kind of fame he enjoys now. Indeed, the room in the Pinacoteca of the Musei Capitolini in Rome in which two now famous Caravaggios are housed (the portrait “John the Baptist as a Young Man” and “Two Gentlemen”) is dominated by a much larger painting by a less-well known artist, the room

⁶⁹ In saying this, we must of course recognise that San Luigi de'Francesi's treasures are *within* the Church, so at least some kind of detour from a putative post-prandial walk must be admitted.

being known as the “Saint Petronella Room” after the subject of this painting.⁷⁰

So is the preference for Caravaggio meant to mark Angeloni out as a connoisseur of art, someone who appreciates great work, even if it is not fashionable? Perhaps in Gadda’s drawing of the character all three of these readings are intended. But there is another link that Gadda makes himself in “Il pasticciaccio”:

Se mi è permessa una battuta auto-esegetica dirò che codesto fermo di un ghiottone solitario, celibe e malinconico, soggetto a crisi di ipotimia ciclica, codesto fermo risponde pienamente, in misura un po’ caricata, e vero, al clima eroico dell’epoca sitibonda di prole: epoca ove il celibe era schedato a spregio, fosse pure Gesù Cristo, Michelangelo, Beethoven o Mazzini Giuseppe: e pagava una speciale tassa, quasi una multa infamante, come se la condizione di celibato costituisse – dopo che frode continuata nel riguardi del santo numero (qurantaquattro milioni, allora) – anche una fonte di reddito. In un mondo in cui bisognava “credere” per forza era proibito essere malinconici. Talché il ritrattino del commendatore prosciuttòfilo ridonda anche a uno scherno, da parte mia, di quell’entusiasmo alquanto verbale e fittizio, di quel buonumore fresconcello, di quel dinamismo scenico e meramente teatrale, di che lo zelo clamoroso dei commossi, o degli pseudo commossi, in ogni stagione della patria, s’è fatto vanga e zappa da tirar l’acqua al molinuccio. E poi, e poi: nessuna legge umana o divina inibisce a un cittadino italiano di amare i carciofini all’olio: e di essere malinconico e celibe come Nostro Signore e come l’apostolo e profeta Mazzini[.]
(VM SGF I 507)

If I am permitted an self-exegising joke, I would say this arrest of a solitary, unmarried and melancholic glutton, subject to crises of

⁷⁰ It should be mentioned that the rooms in the Capitoline Museums are named for the most famous pieces found therein, not necessarily the grandest: an example is the Sala delle Oche.

cyclical hypothyria, this arrest responds fully, in a slightly loaded measure, it's true, to the heroic climate of the thirsty epoch of the people: the epoch when the unmarried man was labelled by prejudice, be he even Jesus Christ, Michelangelo, Beethoven or Mazzini, Giuseppe: and paid a special tax, almost a defaming fine, as if condition of 'single man' constituted - after the continued fraud regarding the sacred number (forty-four million, then) - also a source of cash. In a world in which one must "believe" it was prohibited to be melancholic. So much so the little portrait of the prosciuttophile commendatore is also a sneering, on my part, at that so verbal and fictitious enthusiasm, at that breezy good humour, at that scenic and purely theatrical dynamism, for whom the noisy zeal of the moved, or pseudo-moved, in every season of the patria, is made spade and hoe for taking water to his mill. And so on, and so on: no law, human or divine, forbids an Italian citizen to love carcofini in oil: to be melancholic and single like Our Lord and like the prophet Mazzini.

Gadda, as Stellardi notes (Stellardi 61), identifies himself very strongly with Angeloni: his preferences are to be read to some extent (even if it is only a "battuta auto-esegetica") as Gadda's own, especially in terms of the discrimination that he feels, and Angeloni experiences, at the hands of the authorities; authorities which, after all, are Fascist authorities. It is also instructive to see that this comes directly after the mention of Caravaggio, who, although he is not mentioned in this quotation,⁷¹ could have been said to have been similarly defamed for his sexual preferences – critics have long wondered if it was Caravaggio's alleged homosexuality and paedophilia that had obscured

⁷¹ Unless "Michelangelo" is taken to refer to Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio rather than Michelangelo Buonarroti, a most unlikely contention.

him from history, and Berenson's silence on that part of his story is just as telling as a book condemning him. In this sense, the "carciofini all'olio", delicious as they no doubt are, take on a different meaning, and the status of "celibe" is indicative of more than just being unmarried. "Without a single direct reference, Angeloni emerges as signifying the homosexual male. He is a male, but ambiguous, suspect, open to feminization. [...] Angeloni's interrogation proves that a man can be a woman. (Diaconescu-Blumenfeld 35).

We have already had cause to reflect on Marchesini's reading of Gadda as a cross-dressing homosexual (although the evidence that we were discussing at that time did not necessarily support her view) and here there is a further argument to see Gadda in this kind of role. It is not that I am equating cross-dressing, or Gadda's homosexuality ("come non vedere, però, nella storia e nell'esperienza di Gadda terreni favorevoli allo sviluppo d'una personalità omosessuale?" (Roscioni 1997 300) [how can we fail to recognise, in the history of Gadda's experience, a terrain favourable to the development of a homosexual personality?]) with Caravaggio's crimes, but merely pointing out that Caravaggio's imprisonment finds an echo in the unjustified arrest of Angeloni, and that Angeloni – who we may view as the author's representative – is an admirer of Caravaggio. Further to that, we may speculate as to what this

association may have meant to Gadda, or debate Gadda's own psychology through this part of his writing.⁷² Caravaggio and Gadda have other things in common as well: both traveled to Rome from northern Italy to make a living, of course, both being artists dependant on the patronage of others and at the mercy of the critics. Their biographies may be vastly different from every other point of view, but, as other writers, Raimondi and Dombroski foremost, have stated, to dismiss the comparison as facile is to miss the point: the comparison is invited by Gadda, not by the critic. In the absence of biographical data we are to draw our conclusions from the art itself, in the case both of Gadda and Caravaggio: "If we knew nothing of the crime which made Caravaggio a fugitive from Roman justice, and had only the evidence of the works which we know to have been executed before this event, we should still see that an internal conflict was already working powerfully in Caravaggio's mind." (Hinks 1953 40) And besides, Gadda seeks the influence of Caravaggio in his art as well: there is the quality of light and the inherent "baroqueness" that Gadda claims as part of his view of the world.

⁷² It is also worth noting that Caravaggio's occasionally excessive life and legend may have had a glamour that was attractive to Gadda. In the turbulent life of Caravaggio is found "the prototype of an ideal 20th century artist", according to Helen Langdon in her introduction to the *Lives of Caravaggio* (Mancini et al 2005 24).

Gadda and Caravaggio, it would be argued, I believe, by Gadda himself, use the symbols, stories and signs of Catholicism in a similar way. They both use the set-pieces offered by the religious context to narrative effect. The goal is not so much to instruct or to represent as it is to draw the reader, the viewer into a relationship with the art, to tell a story. Gadda, again in "Il pasticciaccio" tells us as much of Caravaggio in a typically humourous interlude:

(A Santa Maria del Popolo, 1952, due sposini in viaggio nuziale: Paolo atterrato dalla folgore: raccorciato, nanificato a terra dalle leggi inesorabili della prospettiva. Tutto il quadro occupato dalla Bestia. Scartabellamento della guida del Touring. Con voce soave la sposina: "Icché l'è?": indi subito, ma un po' delusa nel tentativo di esegesi: "e' l'è un ca-àllo".) La tela di Paolo e del ca-àllo, a Santa Maria del Popolo, no, non può considerarsi priva di una tal quale accensione romantica, o di significazione drammatica.
(VM SGF I 510)

(In Santa Maria del Popolo, 1952, two newlyweds on honeymoon: Paul knocked to the ground with a thunderbolt: shortened, dwarfed on the ground by the binding laws of perspective. The whole of the painting occupied by the Beast. The skimming through of the Touring Club guide. In a low voice the young bride "An' wha's 'at?": he, straight away, but a bit unsure in his attempt at exegesis: " 'sa horrse".) The painting of Paul and the horrse, in Santa Maria del Popolo, no, cannot consider itself to be without some sort of romantic ignition, or of dramatic significance.

He goes on to say that it is unsuitable for the high altar of the Church, a clear indication that Caravaggio's religious scenes are, for Gadda at least, irreligious, or at least non-devotional, in their effect if not in their subject matter. We can

say the exact same thing of Gadda. While there can be no doubt that Gadda has deliberately used the culture of Christianity in which he and his imagined readership was steeped, his work is not intended to – in fact refuses to – function as affirmative of religious feeling.

5: 3 The Painter's Palette

We have seen that Gadda's appreciation of religious art does not end with a consciousness of its meaning, but neither does it serve only as some kind of code for sex and sexual transgressions. In fact, as Rinaldo Rinaldi points out on his essay on "Colori" in the *Pocket Gadda Encyclopedia*, "Gadda è minuziosissimo colorista": he is always, like a painter, searching for the correct colour to use. In fact, as we have seen, he is not afraid to use the very same colours that we associate with artists: take as an example the wonderful writerly technique on show when Gadda describes Contessa Menegazzi "dai capelli giallastri con tendenza a un Tiziano scarruffato" (QP RR II 38). Here are mixed references to colour, art, the biography of an artist, the city of Venice... a great piece of writing, full of artistic economy, at the service, ultimately, of invoking a colour.

Rinaldi's article contains several insights that are worth recording as we consider the meaning that Gadda gives to the painterly process of colour production, bearing in mind what we have seen in the previous pages. Two in particular are striking: the link between colour and libido in Gadda's literary output is the first that springs to the attention.

La "priapomania" gaddiana [...] si proietta su orizzonti molto estesi che implicano non solo "qualche teoretica idea [...] sui casi degli uomini: e delle donne" ma anche una vera e propria simbologia cromatica.
(Rinaldi 2008)

The Gaddian "priapomania" [...] projects itself onto a vast horizon that implicates not only "some theoretical idea [...] on the affairs of men: and of women" but a real live chromatic symbology.

Secondly, there is the idea that in colour there is something pure, something fundamental for Gadda's project.

È la rivelazione della profonda struttura della realtà, oltre tutte le maschere e i falsi colori dell'ipocrisia, come nella vertigine cromatica dei gioielli finalmente ritrovati del *Pasticciaccio* si raffigura una volta per tutte il sigillo divino, la verità e insieme la sublime ambiguità della Natura e dell'Idea.
(ibid)

It is the revelation of the deep structure of reality, behind all the masks and false colours of hypocrisy, just as the chromatic climax of the jewels that are finally discovered in *That Awful Mess* represents once and for all the divine stamp, truth and at the same time, the sublime ambiguity of Nature and Thought.

After all, Gadda sees colour as prompting the artist to reveal physical and psychological states. He says in “Intervista al microfono” (originally published in 1951 in a collection entitled *Confessioni di scrittori*, collected in *I viaggi, la morte*),

Così un pittore si volge senza speciale vocazione, anzi con certa ripugnanza, a un modello particolarmente ignobile, o squallente, o privo di «segni» della personalità, cioè «insignificante» (È vero che il puro colore lo chiama, e la pittura è arrivata oggi a penetrare indi a ritrarre voluttuosamente i suoi mostri.)
(VM SGF I 503)

Thus a painter will turn himself without special vocation, in fact with a certain repugnance, to a subject that is particularly ignoble, or squalid, or lacking in 'signs' or personality, which is to say, “insignificant”. (It is true that pure colour calls the painter, and painting today has gone as far as penetrating this – now they voluptuously portray their monsters.)

Both Rinaldi’s observations help to draw together what we have already said about the function of religious art, given that we have seen how Gadda uses it to bring out the sexuality and the true feelings of his characters. Similarly, this chromatic key is another text to be read, another set of interpretations to be made. Yet another point of entry for the Gadda scholar. Yet there is more than this to be said here, and Rinaldi gives us another useful springboard in what is a very short article. The reference to the “minerali” of colour reminds us of Gadda’s interest in precious and semi-precious stones, an interest that has

inspired in the criticism several essays, chapters and at least one book, and one that is writ large in the fabric of *Quer pasticciaccio*.

Gadda's interest in geology – a subject on which he was, we must remember, a published writer – is of interest to us because it represents a point at which we can mark the confluence of Gadda's interest in culture and his interest in science.⁷³ As Bertoni says:

I gioielli, per Gadda, sono una [...] ossession[e], posta alla confluenza tra storia e scienza, tra mondo organico e mondo inorganico, tra il disordine convulso delle vicende umane e il geometrico, cristallino rigore delle formazioni minerali.
(Bertoni 2002)

Jewels are, for Gadda, an obsession, a point of confluence between history and science, between the organic and inorganic world, between the convulsive disorder of human affairs and the geometric, crystalline rigor of mineral formations.

Bertoni also reminds us in his essay of Amigoni's assertion that there is "un complicato sistema di simbolismo erotico" (Amigoni 1995 115) built with the jewels that Liliana gives to her cousin, Valdarena. In this sense, the jewels represent not only the "disordine convulso delle vicende umane" and the price

⁷³ Gadda's study of mineralogy must have been zealous: his copy of the textbook by Ettore Artini, *Minerali* (Milano: Editore Hoepli, 1914) was stamped "Gerprüft" and signed "Tenente Carlo Emilio Gadda, Block C - no. 3083", indicating that it was in Gadda's possession during his time as a prisoner of war in Germany.

– as Liliana seems to see it – of a child, a valdarenuccio, but family history, sex and death. The stones seem to represent everything, like the egg in T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*.

Gadda's appreciation of art and his appreciation for colour are linked to an appreciation of the world of organic chemistry and geology. While this present study has concentrated thus far on the religious and specifically Catholic influences, and while we will go on to concentrate on physics, it is part of the task to remind the reader that there is no easy categorization of Gadda's art. Departing from religious art, we have very easily found ourselves in the environs of the painter's colour choices, a few steps away from Gadda's fascination with stones, geology and minerals. Equally, the science that we are to discuss in the following pages cannot be cut off from Gadda's appreciation of what we would today call the humanities, as we shall discover.

5: 4 Catholic Gadda

We can profitably speculate further: Gadda's use of the Christian symbols, myths and texts that we have witnessed in the previous chapters speaks of a kind of attraction to the world of Christianity. This is, again, not to say that

Gadda would have relished the Christian life, but perhaps the solidity and certainty in terms of rectitude and eschatology, the terra firma on which life can be lived without the grey areas of morality that follow the Death of God, or – in less dramatic terms – the gradual ebbing away of Christian belief that Nietzsche noted. Again, we cannot insist that the actions of human beings have been much altered in the post-Christian era, but when it was at its full strength, Christianity offered a handrail, a philosophical support to its adherents. Knowing Right from Wrong and Truth from Falsehood with the certainty of Mother Church may make one's psychological life easier, even if it is less free.

Gadda's inability to believe in the dogmas of the religion forces him to tackle the world through his writing: his lack of certainty may even be the driving force behind his fiction. We can read his literary output as an attempt to create and control a world that conforms to his own psychological needs. Fortunately, he is too intelligent a person and subtle a writer for that project to succeed.

While Christianity offered no certainties for Gadda, there was another world that might have done: the world of the scientists and positivists, of Laplace. Gadda grew up in a time where there was the possibility that everything could

be measured, examined, put in its proper place and – importantly – predicted based on the knowledge accumulated. He embraced this world and its mathematics. In the second part of this present work we will examine the outcome.

Part Two: Gadda as Scientist

1: Introduction to Gadda as Scientist

In this chapter it is my intention to bring to the attention of the reader the most important aspects of Gadda's career as an engineer for our present argument. To begin, it will be necessary to spend time not only introducing the topic of the discussion, but also detailing important areas of Gadda's education and working life. While this aspect of Gadda's character has by no means been ignored by other critics, as we shall see in a moment, I believe that there is more to be said on the matter, and intend to use part of this chapter to say why I think this kind of study is important to literature and art in general.

Unlike most people, Carlo Emilio Gadda managed to have two successful careers in contrasting areas. His work as an electrical engineer – despite Gadda's own dissatisfaction with it – was a large and important period of his life. One does not do any kind of job and not be affected by it, and Gadda had to study, work hard and live as an engineer before he could produce the quality of work in literature that has assured his belated fame.

Gadda may have become an engineer at his mother's behest, or because his cousins were making money from it, but his studies in the field of physics and mathematics left their marks all the same on his psyche. One example is perhaps to be found in Gadda's penchant for lists, a typically positivistic, scientific method of describing the world. We might find this in the discovery of the jewels in *Quer pasticciaccio*, as Roscioni indicates: "La scoperta delle gioie in casa della Mattonari permette a Gadda di esibirsi in uni dei suoi prediletti esercizi. L'enumerazione [...] è infatti uno dei topoi caratteristici della sua prosa." (Roscioni 1975 24) This is just one of the ways that the scientific mindset of the time is shown in his writing. The study of scientific disciplines is weighty stuff and when this is added to the charisma of teachers, the positivism of society at the time, the change in outlook required by the student and, above all, the revolutions in theory and practice that left the early twentieth century spinning and dizzy with progress, one has an experience that is life-changing.

It is needful that we begin with some sort of overview of the state and development of science (particularly physics) in the period that Gadda studied in. Next we may feel called upon to make clear Gadda's biography in relation to the timeline of changes in physics. There then must be a review of Gadda's

literary uses of his scientific knowledge. These specific examples can then be expanded to a general concept that may be of use: could we share these insights with other artists and intellectuals?

This, then, is no small matter, and it is surprising that it has been attempted so rarely. We may note that scientists are remarkably poor at writing their own history and most literary critics lack the grounding in science to make the connections. In our present field of study, we have a number of articles by the Politecnico's own Andrea Silvestri, professor of energy systems at the august institution, who has recognised the importance Gadda's practical career must have had on his art and written of Gadda the Scientist with clarity and insight. Silvestri's output provides an indispensable foundation for this present work, although I intend to intrude on the texts in a way that he does not, concentrating mainly as he does on biography.⁷⁴ In addition, we have recently had the publication of Franco Gàbici's *Il dolore della Cognizione* but the length of this volume does not give the author the opportunity to explore any of the texts in great detail, and the later works (*Cognizione del dolore* and *Quer pasticciaccio*) are barely treated at all. As a result, the contribution of this volume to the critical

⁷⁴ That said, it will be necessary to spend some time on Gadda's biography in this chapter before going on to examine other ideas.

literature has been variously evaluated. Most writers who deal with this issue do not come from the scientific background that Gábici has, and touch on the matters at hand with varying degrees of depth, pointing out the importance of Gadda's "other" life. That said, it is difficult to find a critic capable of acknowledging both sides of C.P. Snow's two cultures in general terms: Arthur I. Miller, an American academic, has written intelligently and engagingly on the cultural effects of twentieth century physics and his interesting – but perhaps ultimately unconvincing, given his reservations regarding literary studies and, in particular, postmodernism – book on Einstein and Picasso is a key inspiration for my attempt to synthesise the worlds of science and art in the study of one important artist, but the trend in literary studies and especially non-specialist works is to maintain a historical tone and avoid any critical reading of the text in the light of the scientific history that it presents. An example can be found in the critical chronology in the Everyman Library edition of *The Dain Curse*. Here is found the information that in 1905, when Dashiell Hammett was 11, there happened something called "Einstein's theory of relativity" (Hammett 2007 xvii). This is not secret history: the reader may be well aware that *The Maltese Falcon* was written in a world where time was no longer an absolute marker for experience. Now, this is an example of accumulation of facts: the critical

chronology is not a place to look for much insight. Yet, given that it is recognised as powerful and important, it is surprising how seldom the influence of the history of 20th century science is discussed in criticism. The question that criticism does not answer, or even pose, is what effect does this “theory of relativity” have on Hammett, Sam Spade or the anonymous hero of “The Girl with the Silver Eyes”? James Ellroy’s excellent introduction to the volume cited above will not enlighten us on that account either. Again, we find in modern philosophy plenty of discussion about time, its unreality and the possibility (or otherwise) of “futation”, but it is discussed in the terms of Hamlet, of pre-Socratics, of Heidegger. But not Einstein, Planck or Clerk Maxwell.

“The time is out of joint!” How could the time, the present, be thought of in such a way that it could then in a second, but simultaneous moment be thought of as being “out of joint” ... [it] leads directly to the great essay on Anaximander which is virtually the dead centre of all of Derrida’s meditations on Heidegger and where it is precisely in these terms that Anaximander’s own expression is analysed.
(Jameson 2008 41)

This is by no means a poor essay on Marx, Derrida or Heidegger, but it is most strange that one can talk of these things without confronting the fact that time has been out of joint in a real sense since 1905. Jameson avoids this instead by talking about “thought”, as if human thought can exist independently of the

information going around in other parts of the mind. Critics of literature and philosophy, when they acknowledge the scientific advances and theoretical breakthroughs that make our world what it is, shy away from describing them, from digging deeper.

One of the reasons for the paucity of texts on the literary significance of the movements and changes in physics in the early 20th century is that, as Snow noted, the divergence between the scientific intellectual and humanistic intellectual grew and did not narrow with the advance of time. In fact, the branches of as pure a field as mathematics were so hopelessly massive by the time of Poincaré's death for him to go down in history as the last of the "non-specialists" in maths. Anyone who wants to study the subject in depth now has to be a statistician *or* a topographer *or* a computer modeller, rather than a general mathematician. Here is where the Enlightenment begins to fail for us.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ What follows is a homage to the philosophical tradition of dialogic argument, notably practiced before now by Plato and David Hume. It is here used as a way of quickly introducing the reader to the central concerns of the chapter.

*Philo*⁷⁶: but the Enlightenment has saved us from the tyranny of Religion, our minds are free to research and decide on the evidence presented to us.

Ruckus: It is true that a revolution was necessary for us to move in the direction we have. But surely you can't mean to say that the situation we live in now is preferable?

P: But of course! We have the Liberty to ask questions of the Universe and use our own minds to discern the answers. Think of the things we know that Scientific Discovery has taught us: The Periodic Table! The Steam Engine! The Second Law of Thermodynamics! The Plasma Screen Television! Deoxyribonucleic Acid! We have escaped Plato's cave and see the figures casting shadows on our walls as they really are.

R: Do these things contribute to human happiness?

P: There are few things more beautiful than the Periodic Table and the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

R: I grant you that. But these are of little consequence to our conception of ourselves, wouldn't you say?

P: Think of Crick and Watson. Watson said that the discovery of DNA essentially did away with any need to imagine a God. The process of Empirical Investigation killed off our need for any Deity.

⁷⁶ While this is under debate even today by scholars, the consensus is now that "Philo" is the character who is closest to expressing the thoughts of David Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Human Understanding*. "Ruckus", on the other hand, is part pun, part offering to the shade of the late Rick Roderick, Habermas scholar and philosophy professor at Duke University.

R: James Dewey Watson said a lot of things. So we have no need to imagine God. This grants us liberty. The freedom to use our own minds as the measure of all things, but to somehow agree that we mean what we mean when we say it.

P: Yes.

R: And how is this different from Saint Thomas Aquinas?

P: I beg your pardon?

R: Didn't Tom of Aquinas, that obese Dominican thinker, the World's First Deep Fat Friar, do much the same? He was born into a society with a particular way of looking at the world and made a career from examining it and explaining it and asking the sorts of questions that your Mendeleev and James Watson would ask the natural world. It just so happens that he didn't believe that the worlds of chemistry and biology were all that essential, or more important than the constructions, mechanisms and contradictions of theology and sacred texts.

P: To me that is the very epitome of shoddy thinking! He rejected the evidence of his own eyes to concentrate on legends and out-moded conceptions of how the world works.

R: You started it, talking about Plato.

P: Very funny. But Aquinas! For goodness sake! Whenever he came up against something that he was unable to explain he invoked the existence of angels! Look at the *Summa Theologica*. It is full of angels, and not one word about Science and believing the evidence of your own eyes.

R: You are fond of your eyes, Philo. But I wonder if you have really read the *Summa*. The very first section is the one in which he discusses Sacred Doctrine and its relation to other Sciences.

P: Other Sciences!

R: Yes. There are two kinds. One that one examines by the light of the world, the other that one examines by the Light of the World. With capital letters. And I am not bothered by your angels, either. How would your Watson explain love?

P: Love is genetic. There are genes in your makeup that decide your propensity to love, anger, stupidity and belief in angels.

R: And how is it different to say that we believe that angels cause love rather than genes cause it?

P: Your genome amazes me. We have seen them. There are scientists who have isolated genes associated with various character traits.

R: There are people who have seen angels.

P: There are people who believe they have seen angels.

R: And the scientists?

P: They are people of great learning, knowledge and understanding of the way the world works. They train for years in the subject that they choose so that they may truly stand of the shoulders of giants. Their work is subject to the most exacting scrutiny.

R: You could say much the same about St. Thomas. But you are putting a lot of faith in the scientist, and the peer-review process. What if they err?

P: We have philosophical constructs that will not permit them to fall into Error. We use these philosophical truths and logic to ensure that we build on Newton, Darwin, Einstein and Watson and Crick to complete our knowledge of humanity.

R: We have discovered, then, that you haven't read the *Summa Theologica*. May I assume that you are acquainted with the writings of Newton. The *Principia Mathematica*, I assume, is a standard text.

P: I believe it is a very important text in the history of science, and I use a computer, fly abroad, and enjoy satellite television as its ultimate fruits. But I have not read it myself.

R: If you have not read these texts, why do you believe in the scientists who quote them? Surely they have the same value to you as St. Thomas, St. Augustine, Christianity, Judaism and Aristotle.

P: But these are not true! There is no truth to the legends of Christian thought! Science reflects the real world. It is Truth!

R: Interesting that you should bring up that word. I had not mentioned it. I freely grant you the point that science would seem to be a very accurate description of the world as it is. But Truth is a sticky point for us both. I believe that your double helix is a better picture of the world than that offered by angels, but I still stick to my basic assumption. You, personally, here and now, are no more certain than I am of the Truth of these theories. They are of no more use for the generation of warm feelings of certainty than the monolith of religion was. In fact they are much less useful. Science is now not only too diverse and grand for one human to master and understand

in his three score and ten, but it carries the tyrannical obligation for one to enquire with it. At least with religion you had the option to shut up and take what was given to you. Now you are condemned to freedom and doubt.

P: I don't "doubt".

R: As long as you don't think. But the thinking people in the last hundred years have had to come to terms with a system that obliges one to either grapple eternally with the task of learning everything or surrender to the knowledge of others. The only way to live in our system is a surrender to dogma. The same surrender that thinking people made to the Church in 13th Century Europe. And we are, as individuals, as far from Truth as we ever were.

The failure of the Enlightenment in this regard is also the indicator of its great success. Material culture born of instrumental reason has changed the world in which we live beyond the wildest dreams of Hume. For all that, it has not brought us closer to Clear Understanding, Final Closure or Ultimate Happiness. If anything, it has diverted us from even considering these as goals.

So what I am going to be investigating here is not the reality of science, nor will I question the technological advances that are undoubtedly part of the early 20th century. Here I am concerned with the mindset, the ways of thinking that are

engendered by the scientific revolutions of the period from the Enlightenment to the late 1800s, and the way that these were challenged in the climate of discovery in the 1900s. This, and what these challenges could mean to someone who had invested study, time and faith in the scientific revolution.

Gadda's discovery that Christianity does not, in fact, give these much-sought gifts out either (at least without that divine gift of Faith) is mirrored in his realisation that the scientific method cannot soothe the enquiring human mind. In this, Gadda is ahead of writers such as Max Weber, Herbert Marcuse and even Jürgen Habermas in realising that the life of instrumental rationality is not, after all, the perfect life and end of history for humanity.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ These disparate writers are unified in their criticism of the Enlightenment project of instrumental rationality. Marcuse is well known for his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), the arch-antipositivist Weber for initiating the discussion on "rationalisation" that Habermas (see in particular Habermas 1985)– and others such as Adorno and Horkheimer, as Rorty (1989) points out. They are here polemically contrasted with Francis Fukuyama, whose *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) is the book most closely associated with the glorification of the political outcomes of Enlightenment thought (notwithstanding Fukuyama's later reconsideration of his own project: see Fukuyama 2002).

1: 2 Gadda as student and as *ingegnere*

Now that I have put forward some kind of introduction to my investigation of Gadda as Scientist, and shown why I believe this kind of enterprise will yield results for the critic, I will provide the reader with a starting point, a means of access by discussing the salient points of Gadda's biography both as student and engineer. In this way, we will see what his life contained in terms of scientific influence, and will stand us in good stead for later speculation.

Gadda's studies at the Politecnico di Milano began, actually, before the Poli got its new name, in 1912. It was the Istituto Tecnico Superiore⁷⁸ in those days, and, even when it became the Politecnico, it was distinguished with the prefixing of a "Regio", until, of course, the monarchy was abolished 1946.

Even in those days, the college was well known enough to attract high-quality teachers such as Max Abraham, a graduate student under no less a figure than the Max Planck (of whom more below), and someone who Einstein himself highly respected. Abraham himself was a scientist of the German university system, a member of a generation of Jewish intellectuals to be granted the

⁷⁸ Less grand, perhaps, in translation: Superior Technical Institute.

privilege of teaching posts that had been traditionally denied to their forebears (Jungnickel and McCormmach 1986 248) At Milan, he found a university that was far below the standard he would have expected in Germany (ibid), but among the best in Italy. The course that Gadda in Milan followed was quite different to the one that Enrico Fermi was to experience at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. While the Pisans were grounded in a more traditional, mathematical approach to the subject (Fermi's undergraduate work was mostly based on deriving and solving equations), Gadda and his classmates were to be prepared for practical engineering work. This involved some study of theoretical topics, but this was not the main emphasis of the course. The emphasis instead was on industry, application and subsequent usefulness. Marconi had made Italy a world leader in the new technologies afforded by advances in the study of physics, but there was a slowness to accept the need for investment in the theoretical study of the subject: the country was not to have a dedicated atomic physics professorship until it was created for the 24 year-old Enrico Fermi in 1925.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Cfr Michelangelo De Maria, Mario Grilli and Fabio Sebastiani, *Proceedings of the international conference on the restructuring of physical sciences in Europe and the United States, 1945-1960 : Università "La Sapienza", Rome, Italy 19-23 September 1988* (Singapore: World Scientific, 1989), especially chapter 10, pp 321-361.

If the Regio Istituto Tecnico Superiore was not much interested in theoretical physics, it nonetheless afforded some study in the area to its electrical engineering students. And Gadda was to be free in the first years of his study (before the war) to follow other academic interests as well: a course (receiving a mark of 9 out of 10) in German, one in Italian Literature (8/10), and others in Line Drawing (8/10) and Mineralogy (8/10). There were, of course, other subjects that were more important to the eventual aim of “being an engineer”, and Gadda performed very well in them. Experimental physics, General and inorganic Chemistry, Calculus, Algebra, Mathematical Analysis and Architectural Drawing were all covered. He achieved no mark lower than 7 in his first year, and though Silvestri notes that “meno felici nell’insieme gli esiti del secondo anno” (Silvestri 46) [all in all, the results for his second year were less happy], it would seem that Gadda was in no danger of failing any of his subjects.

The young Gadda did not sit any exams in the year 1914-1915, his third year. He had volunteered in Milizia Territoriale, and was a Sottotenente (Second Lieutenant) in the 5th Alpine Regiment, Edolo Battalion. The war was to prove a difficult period for him, and on his return he found that his brother, Enrico, had

been killed. His efforts, then, in graduating with a mark of 90 out of one hundred should be recognised as quite an achievement, given the unsettling time he had experienced. He wrote to Ugo Betti that he was now entering the job market:

Adesso sto vedendo di cominciare a lavorare e annuso di qua e di là.
Le condizioni del mercato del bestiame bovino, nonchè degli asini e dei muli.
(IF 124)

Now I'm looking to start to work and I'm sniffing out prospects here and there. The conditions are that of a cattle market, to say nothing of asses and mules.

Oddly enough, Gadda seems to use this farm animal metaphor often enough when describing his experiences as an engineer. Elsewhere in his letters, for example, he refers to himself, saying:

finchè farò l'ingegnere sarò un bruto e nient'altro che un bruto:
l'ingegnere si può paragonare a un bue sotto tutti gli aspetti. È
l'essere ineccitabile per eccellenza.
(Letter to Silvio Guarnieri, 5th February 1932. Quoted in Silvestri 1994
10)

As long as I work as an engineer I will be a beast of burden and nothing else. The Engineer can be compared to an ox in all respects. He is the unexcitable being par excellence.

Gadda's disillusionment – or was he ever “illusioned” at all? – with the working world is famously summed up in the opening sentences of the essay “Come Lavoro”: ‘How I work’.

Come non lavoro. Che dà egual frutto, a momenti, nella vicenda oscillante d'uno sprito fugitivo e aleatorio, chiamato dall'improbabile altrettanto e forse più che dal probabile: da una puerizia atterrita e dal dolore e dalla disciplina militare e di scuola delabante poi verso il nulla, col suo tesoro d'oscurità e d'incertezze.
(VM SGF I 427)

How I don't work. Which gives the same fruit, at times, in the unsteady life of a transitory and changeable spirit, called by the improbable just as much as, and perhaps more than, the probable: by a frightening childhood, by pain, by the discipline of the army and the schoolroom, staggering towards nothingness, with his treasury of obscurity and uncertainty.

It is at this point in his life that, having given up his engineering profession if not his love of physics and mathematics, Gadda begins to produce the best of his fiction, perhaps saving himself in the process from “il nulla”. That is not to say that he gives up his job as an engineer immediately the idea pops into his head that he would like to be a great writer. He travels to Argentina, to Buenos Aires to work for the Compañía General de Fósforos for a little over a year, from December 1922 to February 1924. Roscioni suggests that there may have been some greasing of the wheels for Carlo Emilio to have this well-paid job: “è probabile che a procurargli la nuova assunzione abbiano ... contribuito

Giuseppe Gadda e Ettore Conti" [It is probable that Giuseppe Gadda and Ettore Conti helped in having him taken on] (Roscioni 189). Gadda himself considered himself lucky to have a "somewhat gilded" opportunity, and thought furthermore more that he could "scrape together some savings" in just a few years (ibid). His letters home give us few details of his work in Argentina, and Roscioni laments the loss of a letter to Clara dated 24th December 1922 ("una lunga lettera, in due buste, con descrizione della società, dell'ambiente, ecc. ecc.") [A long letter, in two envelopes, with a description of the company, the atmosphere, etc.] ibid 191). On the other hand, Roscioni is quite sure to tell us that "Gadda era non soltanto un ottimo ingegnere, un competente e zelantissimo collaboratore, ma anche il più probo, il più squisito e, almeno in apparenza, il più disarmato degli uomini." [Gadda was not only a top-quality engineer, but also the most proper, correct and – at least in appearance – the most pacific of men] (ibid 193). Gadda, despite all this, is quite homesick, and heads home before he can really start getting his "gruzzoletto" together.

He returns to Milan to write – or rather to begin writing – the *Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento* and study philosophy. He completes his exams, despite having to return to engineering work in Rome for Società Ammonia Casale in

1925, but he never completes his thesis. In 1932 (or late 1931) he starts working for the Sezione Tecnologica dell'Ufficio Centrale dei Servizi Tecnici del Vaticano on the building of a hydroelectric complex, for which he has responsibility for the circuitry. In the meantime, he has been writing, and although it is not published until after his death, he seems to have completed a draft of his *Meditazione Milanese*, which deals with some matters pertinent to the topic of Gadda as scientist, by June of 1928. Gadda seems to have undertaken the work as a way of trying to make sense of the world from philosophical standpoint.

As Mileschi says:

Gadda arriva a concepire il mondo come mostruosa matassa di relazioni spingendo fino all'estremo limite lo sforzo di comprensione razionale. Agisce cioè all'interno dei confini definiti dal razionalismo (o positivismo, o determinismo, [...] – comunque una filosofia e un apparato metodologico che presuppongono che a un determinato fatto si possa trovare una determinata e sufficiente spiegazione); e dal di dentro scopre che il metodo razionale, se applicato con vera coerenza, diventa assolutamente inutilizzabile per la ragione e il metodo dell'uomo.

(Mileschi 2007b)

Gadda comes to conceive of the world as a monstrous tangle of relations that push rational comprehension to its extremes. Acting therefore within the confines defined by rationalism (or positivism, or determinism, or in any case a philosophy that presupposes that for any given fact a given and sufficient explanation can be given); and from within one discovers that the rational method, if applied properly and coherently, becomes absolutely unusable for the rationality and method of humankind.

Gadda did not believe that the *meditazione* was ready for publication: “Questo primo abbozzo, pur sviluppando idee chiare e concatenate nella mia mente, [...] è letterariamente assai confuse e incomposto” (MM SVP 850) [This first draft, even if it develops some ideas that are clear and together in my mind, [...] is stylistically somewhat confused and incomplete”]. Mileschi says that “Gadda depreca il valore e la portata dello scritto, propone di intitolarlo “Meditazione grossolana” o “Meditazione grossa” – lo chiama “Meditazione prima”, il che sottintende scritti futuri, che venissero a completare e perfezionare il primo e insoddisfacente tentativo[.]” (ibid) [Gadda deprecates the value and import of the writing, proposing as titles “A Rough Meditation” or “A Thick Meditation” – he calls it “A First Meditation”, implying future writing that will bring to a conclusion and perfect this first, unsatisfying attempt.]⁸⁰ Other admirers of the work admit that there are substantial difficulties regarding the completeness of the manuscript that was published in 1973:

Nel cuore del manoscritto appaiono delle considerazioni molto severe sul suo grado di incompiutezza: il 15 giugno, nella nota introduttiva al XXI paragrafo l'autore afferma che dovrà «riscrivere completamente» la *Meditazione* per «sistemare e dare ordine a questa confusa materia» D'altro canto il fatto rivelante è che in questo *disordine* ci sono molti *richiami*. La notazione è importante in quanto definisce il passaggio del discorso da una fase in cui Gadda si limita a

⁸⁰ Cfr De Jorio 1996.

segnalare lo stato del lavoro, ad un'altra più elaborata che vuole giustificare l'incompletezza del manoscritto.
(De Jorio Frisari 21)

The book might be incomplete, but that does not mean that it is of less than central importance to the student of Gadda's philosophy. It might also be of interest to those working on interpretation and adaptations of Bergson, a field in which I am not qualified – I found the “Glossario Bergsoniano” prepared by De Jorio Frisari (De Jorio Frisari 211) to be of great help – although there is plenty here to interest the general student in the history of the development of thought in the twentieth century: much of what makes Gadda interesting as a literary figure also holds true insofar as he is also a philosopher. The fact that he abandoned his potential career as a philosophical writer in exchange for fiction is also of interest: the same concerns that drove him to attempt the *Meditazione* drive him to produce *Quer pasticciaccio*. It seems that his dissatisfaction with his attempt to express his view of the world, in its “mostruosa matassa di relazioni” in the language of philosophy caused him to redouble his efforts in literature.

1931 sees *La Madonna dei Filosofi* published, and he finally gives up work in 1934 with the publication of *Il Castello di Udine*, a book that receives a literary prize and the praise of the critic Gianfranco Contini. The rest is literary history, as

opposed to the history of Gadda as an engineer. That said, no-one believes that Gadda's life as a man interested in science ends here. While much has been made of his "matrimonio sbagliato" with the world of engineering, his desire instead to wed himself to literature and philosophical discourse, it should be remembered that Gadda was not in any sense a failure in his chosen profession. On the contrary, the exam results recorded above show someone who is more than competent in the academic disciplines required. His 1932 job, the most important engineering role, in the Vatican's hydro-electric plant, is not one that would have just been handed out to him because he had friends in the Ratti family, the family that produced Pius XI. He was a published writer, not only of fiction, but of technical and learned journalism. His ability as an engineer was not in doubt.

Furthermore, there was some kind of love for the basics behind that profession:

Se avessi una decisiva avversione per la matematica, sarei un uomo felice: mi getterei freneticamente sul lavoro filosofico e letterario: ma tanto mi piace la matematica, e la meccanica razionale, e la fisica, e tanto più là dove si elabora e si raffina l'analisi.
(GGP SGF II 793)

If I had a decisive aversion to mathematics, I would be a happy man. I would throw myself frenetically into my philosophical and literary work. But I enjoy them so much: mathematics, and analytical

mechanics, and physics and above all, places where you can work on and refine analyses.

Some commentators even see Gadda's scientific training as distinguishing him radically from other writers who form part of the divided intellectual community that I mentioned above.⁸¹ Pireddu's entry on "Scienza" in the *Pocket*

Gadda Encyclopedia:

E se, già a livello autobiografico, Gadda non sa, e fondamentalemente nemmeno intende contrapporre quelle che C.P. Snow chiamerebbe "le due culture", è nella scrittura che la sinergia di scienza e letteratura gli consente di raggiungere quell' "eccitazione", intesa, come egli stesso sottilmente allude, nella sua duplice valenza umanistica e scientifica di ardore intellettuale e di sollecitazione della materia.

(Pireddu 2002)

And if, from the autobiographical level onwards, Gadda does not recognize, and does not even intend to contrast what C.P. Snow would call "The Two Cultures", it is in his writing that the synergy of science and literature allows him to reach that "excitement", understood, as he himself subtly alludes, in his dual humanistic/scientific valence, in his intellectual ardour and his enquires into matter.

I am in full agreement with Pireddu when she says that the "dolore di fronte all'unica cognizione possibile, quella della molteplicità imprevedibile della realtà di cui l'individuo è inevitabilmente prigioniero" [[The] pain of facing up to the

⁸¹ Gadda can, of course, be grouped in with other literary figures who have a science-based background: Primo Levi, Italo Calvino, etc. Cfr Porro (2007)

only possible knowledge that of the elusive multiplicity of reality, the reality of which inevitably imprisons the individual being] (ibid) is an important factor in Gadda's literature. I will have cause to return to this idea later when we discuss the difficulty Don Ciccio Ingravallo has confronting this very scenario. On top of this, his studies – both serious and dilettante – into the sciences left their mark on his language, made possible many of the coinages for which he is now renowned: “Lo pseudotecnicismo è spesso trascinato da un termine scientifico proprio che lo accompagna nel testo [...] Non di rado, i tecnicismi si presentano pressoché totalmente disimpegnati dalla referenzialità, serializzati in catene giustificate da giochi fonici o dalla propagazione semantica – magari originata da un primo uso metaforico –, coinvolti in un vortice di altri termini deputati a sminuirne la capacità denotativa.” (Zublena 2003) In this part of the thesis, I will be concentrating on Gadda's formation as a scientist, the meaning science had for the genre of detective fiction and his use of science as a means of forming characters, and, while I will have little to say about how Gadda's training affected his lexical virtuosity, it is undeniable that part of the interest in Gadda, his importance as a writer and his success as an artist is due in no small part to his background in the physical sciences.

1: 3 Gadda's Collection of Books

In this section, I will consider the books that Gadda had in his possession at the time of his death in 1973 and in particular those now present in the Burcardo Library in Rome. It is an interesting opportunity to add some data to my hypothesis that Gadda continued to read about, think about and indeed write about science and scientific matters long after his withdrawal from the field of electrical engineering. There follows a discussion on the books I have selected as “pertaining to mathematics or science”. I am certain that Gadda knew he was living through what was an exciting time: the early twentieth century was perhaps the most exciting time in the history of physics, and it is not hard to believe that such a period would cause excitement in anyone with any interest in the topic, let alone a deeply curious man with some substantial expertise.

Thanks to the data made available by Andrea Cortellessa and Maria Teresa Iovinelli, the researching of Gadda's personal collection of books has been much facilitated. My conjecture that a man such as Gadda would have maintained an interest in matters of science after completing his formal studies – that it was more than “just a job”, so to speak – is given additional support in the present reconstructions of his library at the Burcardo in Rome and in the Trivulziana in

Milan. The latter in particular contains quite a few interesting volumes in a relatively small collection.⁸² The books that reached the Trivulziana in Milan were cared for by Roscioni, and clearly were thought by Gadda's friend and biographer to be of special worth to the student of Gadda. Those in the Burcardo are presumably of less interest to most scholars, relatively speaking, but they are proportionally more important to the student wanting an overview of Gadda's life in his books. In the Burcardo's collection, there are a good number of books on scientific matters and a good many on general and more complicated mathematics. Comparatively few, on the other hand, are present from the period up to 1924-1925. We can reasonably assume that there are quite a few missing from the years of his study in physics, as it is normal for textbooks to be treated as utilitarian, rather than as aesthetic, objects. Those that have survived can reasonably be assumed to have had some importance for the Ingegnere. That does not prevent us from asking why the number of significant science books is less than might be expected. There are a number of hypotheses that we must consider. Firstly, we may contend that these books are not found because they never existed. I have already mentioned that the Italian

⁸² Here I am especially grateful to Pedriali, who prepared the catalogue for publication in the *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. It can be consulted here:

<http://www.arts.ed.ac.uk/italian/gadda/Pages/resources/catalogues/trivulz.php>

while the Burcardo catalogue is available here:

<http://www.arts.ed.ac.uk/italian/gadda/Pages/resources/catalogues/burcardoA.php>

universities were slow in recognizing the importance of theoretical physics, and will expand on this topic below (2.2.4). We may also consider that Gadda's interest in the topic waned, or was satiated by the books already in his possession. I consider this last to be a very strong possibility, based on the references to scientific phenomena and such topics in Gadda's literature. Lastly there is the hypothesis that Gadda had in his collection a larger number of scientific books, especially magazines and journals, that have gone missing, been destroyed or not yet been brought to light. While this cannot be discounted as a possibility, it is difficult to prove. Perhaps ultimately we must remain skeptical about the material that has come down to us.

Having said that, I want to categorize what we do have. The scientific books fall into a number of categories. Firstly there are the books relating to Gadda's studies at the Regio Istituto Tecnico in Milan. These include mathematical textbooks, tables of logarithms, handbooks on engineering dated before 1922 (Group A). Then there are a number of technical publications that we can suppose are related to his work, given their limited scope (group B). We find also works on theoretical physics (group C), biology (group D), books about

mathematics that clearly postdate his formal studies (group E) and books about general science or the philosophy of science (group F: labeled “Other”, below).

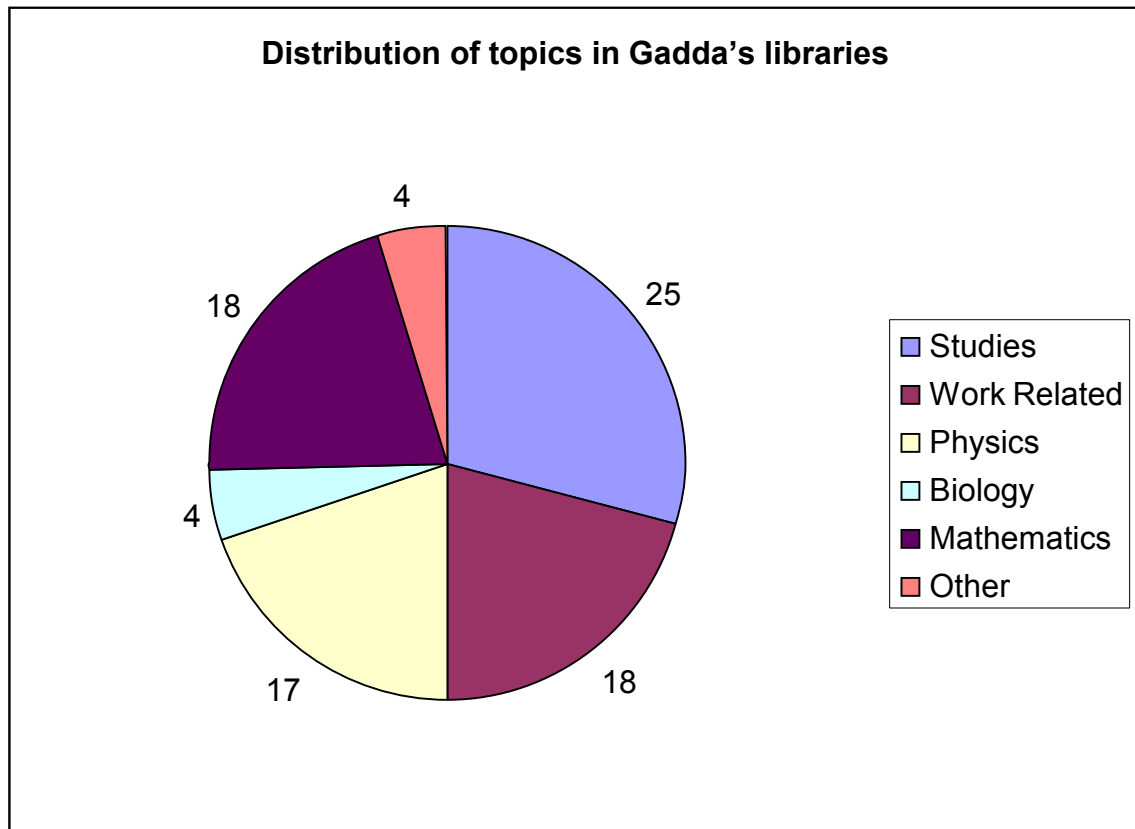
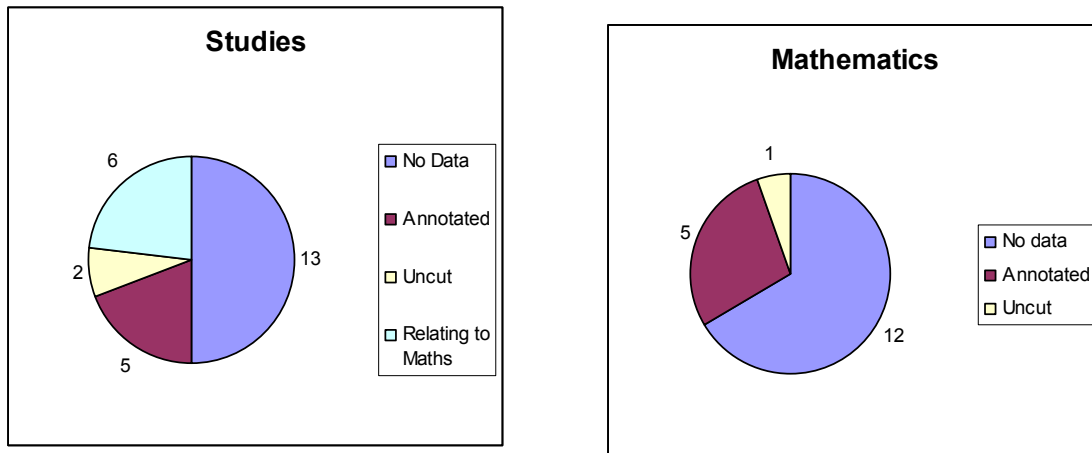


Figure 3

Within groups A and E (“Studies” and “Mathematics” above), there are further distinctions to be made: there are in both groups a number of books that have some form of annotations or underlining, proving that the book was read, and suggesting that the book was read with some care. Conversely, there are a small number of books that are uncut: this would suggest that these books were not

consulted at all, or only partly and somewhat casually.⁸³ Lastly, I have further divided group A to mark how many of the books in this category are on the subject of mathematics.⁸⁴

Figure 4



The data tell us a story in two parts. Firstly, we can see that Gadda was educated in the mathematics and theory of engineering. That much we knew already, perhaps, but the fact that these books have come down to us today as part of the collection suggests also that Gadda viewed these volumes with either some ongoing interest, or some pride. This part of the story is continued by his

⁸³ An example of this is Cornelissen's *Les hallucinations des Einsteinien* which is opened at only two chapters (2, on relativity in mathematical physics and 4, on time dilation). It is tempting to suggest that Gadda may have been particularly interested in these chapters and less so in the rest of the book, but it is a difficult hypothesis to sustain, even if we bear in mind Gadda's love of mathematical problems and the fact that these are probably the most "maths-heavy" chapters of Cornelissen's book.

⁸⁴ None of this subgroup forms part of the "uncut" subgroup.

continuing to keep up to date with new developments while he was working as an engineer (group B). This, again, is as expected, but the paucity of volumes in this category is, to me, surprising. My hypothesis is that much of this material would be linked to specific sites, specific jobs and specific locations, and so never made it in to his personal library. This hypothesis is partially supported by the fact that two of the volumes in group B are gifts from their respective authors, and signed as such, therefore having some personal meaning to Gadda beyond the strictly useful.⁸⁵

The second part of the story is that Gadda continued to buy books about science and mathematics after beginning work as an engineer. Many were bought soon after his return from Argentina, and the majority of these books were on the subject of theoretical physics or mathematics.⁸⁶ His enthusiasm for mathematics continued undiminished and in two separate cases he completed a collection of works by a particular author or from a particular series that he had at the time of his college education (the series by Martini-Zuccagni, Hoepli and Pincherle). The books with a later publication date tend to be about either theoretical physics or biology: there is no book on biology in the collection with a date

⁸⁵ From the authors Carlo Semenza and Ludovico Limentani.

⁸⁶ Fully seventeen of the books in my list are signed 1924 or 1925 (see note below). This is just less than 20% of the eight-six catalogued in the appendix.

earlier than 1940,⁸⁷ the theoretical physics books are published as late as 1966, while the last publication date on a mathematics book is 1951. Apart from the massive spike in the years 1924-5, the books are more or less evenly spread in publication date from the 1920s (with a few before this date) to the 1960s. It seems that Gadda did not at any point stop being interested in science up to his old age.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ A note on dates: where there is a dedication or a date hand written in a book, I have used this as the most accurate way of determining when a book came into Gadda's possession. In most cases no such information is available, so publication date is relied upon to give an earliest possible date of purchase.

⁸⁸ In investigating the parts of Gadda's library now housed in the Burcardo in Rome, I was struck and somewhat disappointed to see that Gadda rarely marked his copies of science books. When compared, for example, to his volumes on philosophy, the difference is striking. That said, many of the books were well-used, and opened at pages that had been pushed down or where the spine had been bent. This led me to the hypothesis that Gadda may have taken notes – he is a reactive reader in most things – on separate sheets of paper when reading books that may have required him to write equations or expound on theories of a complex nature. I hope to be able to investigate this theory in the future, a hope that might be realised as more of Gadda's papers come to light. In any case, there is the unarguable fact that Gadda continued to buy and acquire these books over a long period: this at least suggests that he was reading them.

2: The state of science at the turn of the 20th century

This chapter is concerned primarily with establishing the background to Gadda's studies in science in terms of the scientific community at large. Due to Gadda's background in electricity and his interest in the mathematical side of science, it seems natural to focus on physics: we must agree that this was the most exciting time ever to be involved in the study of the physical sciences. From a starting position at the end of the 1800s from which Lord Kelvin⁸⁹ could claim that scientific enquiry was nearing its end and that the future was almost here, we arrived in 1932 bewildered, overwrought and staring at statistical analyses of electron orbits, unable to tell with certainty where any electron was and how fast it was going. The difficulty of telling such a story is not so much the beginning and the end, but the number of characters. I am going to limit us to just three: James Clerk Maxwell, Max Planck, and Albert Einstein.

2: 1 James Clerk Maxwell

James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879) is the scientist who represents the confidence that Kelvin had in the end of science. He made the startling breakthrough of

⁸⁹ It seems that the quote "There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement" (reputed to have come from a speech in 1900) is of doubtful origin, although it is often cited. What is certain is that the sentiment underlying the statement is representative of the attitudes of scientists of the era.

linking the theories of electricity and magnetism together, although he is often forgotten in discussing the physics of the turn of the century. In the field of literature we find few references to so great a figure, although the novelist Thomas Pynchon⁹⁰ used the concept of “Maxwell’s daemon” in both his short novel *The Crying of Lot 49* and his more famous *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the idea being the subject of an 1867 thought experiment that Maxwell explained in his *Theory of Heat* (1871).

Maxwell was a Scotsman, born in Edinburgh, who, according to the biography written by Basil Mahon, *The Man Who Changed Everything* spent his childhood in relative comfort (financially) in Dumfriesshire, asking the penetrating question: “Whit’s the go o’ that?”, and, if not then satisfied, ‘But what’s the *particular* go of that?’; still the primary concern of the reverse engineer (Mahon 2003 6). His father’s forward-thinking and love of mechanical contraptions were an important contributing factor to his later success, just as some of his ideas were to cause Maxwell problems socially:

He wore clothes designed by his father on what would now be called hygienic principles; he had a lace frill instead of a collar round his neck, a tunic instead of a coat, and square-toed shoes of a novel

⁹⁰ This American author, born in 1937, shares a number of traits with Gadda, not least being his training as an engineer and his use of physics in his texts. For further examples, see *Gravity’s Rainbow* and especially his collection of short stories *Slow Learner*.

pattern, with a brass buckle. All these naturally called for vigorous protest. (Thomson 1931 31)

He studied at Edinburgh University then went on to Cambridge, Aberdeen and King's College and became increasingly respected in the scientific community of the time, and the list of his discoveries is quite awe-inspiring, as is the list of the ways in which Maxwell is honoured nowadays, from the naming of a gap in Saturn's rings to the naming of a CGS unit of magnetic flux. One of Gadda's textbooks, Barni's *Elettrotecnica. Manuale teorico-pratico di elettricità industriale* (Brescia, Vannini, 1922) falls open at the page (222-3) that defines such terms as the Maxwell, suggesting it was a page that Gadda was familiar with. But almost nothing of Gadda's profession could have existed without Maxwell's most groundbreaking moment: the synthesis of theories and computations that are now known as the Maxwell Equations.

We will not spend too long on the content of the equations. Simply put, they are a set of four equations (Gauss' Law, Gauss' Law for Magnetism, Faraday's Law of Induction and Ampère's Circuital Law with Maxwell's correction) that make up the major part of the classical theory of electromagnetism. Each of these laws actually predate Maxwell – apart from his correction, of course, of Ampère's

Law – but his genius was in noticing just what was at stake in their unity. What then follows a brief summation of each of these laws. Gauss' Law was developed by Carl Friedrich Gauss in 1835 and states that the electric flux through any closed surface is proportional to the enclosed electric charge.⁹¹ The integral form of the equation is:

$$\oint_S \mathbf{E} \cdot d\mathbf{A} = \frac{Q_{\text{enclosed}}}{\epsilon_0}$$

with Q standing for the charge enclosed in the surface and ϵ_0 the electrical constant, or vacuum permittivity. Q is the total electric charge, and it does not matter how that charge is distributed: for example, two or more charges could cancel each other, resulting in zero flux. The law can also be used to find the electric field of certain charged surfaces, such as lines, cylinders, spheres and plates.

Gauss' law for magnetism is analogous to this first. The integral form of the law for magnetism is:

$$\oint_S \mathbf{B} \cdot d\mathbf{A} = 0$$

⁹¹ Although it was published for the first time in *Allgemeine Lehrsätze in Beziehung auf die im verkehrtem Verhältnisse des Quadrats der Entfernung wirkenden Anziehungs und Abstossungskräfte* [General theorems regarding the attractive and repulsive forces that act with inverse ratios of the square of the distance]. Carl Friedrich Gauss, *Werke*, Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Göttingen (1867) vol. 5, pp. 195-242.

and means essentially that the magnetic field B has divergence equal to zero, and that there cannot be such a thing as a magnetic monopole. This means that all magnets come in pairs, there cannot be a north with out a south pole. This equation has been revisited in recent years (see below, p 225) but for our purposes, this outcome will suffice.

Faraday's law of Induction states that the electromotive force in any closed circuit is equal to the rate of change in the magnetic flux through the circuit.

The law was formulated by Michael Faraday in 1831 in the form:

$$|\mathcal{E}| = \left| \frac{d\Phi_B}{dt} \right|$$

where ε is the magnitude of the electromotive force and Φ_B is the magnetic flux.

The magnitude of the EMF is measured in volts and the magnetic flux in webers. This law describes to us the possibility of transferring magnetism into electric current by the moving of a permanent magnet relative to a conductor.

The last of the Maxwell equations was formulated in 1826 by Andre-Marie Ampère. Maxwell himself derived it in his 1861 paper, adjusting it to take account of a displacement current that he observed in experiment, leading to it

being named, rather wordily, as Ampère's Circuital Law with Maxwell's correction. It is written in integral form as:

$$\oint_C \mathbf{H} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\ell} = \iint_S (\mathbf{J}_f + \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \mathbf{D}) \cdot d\mathbf{A}$$

It has an application that is more difficult to put into simple terms than the other three equations, but it has a function analogous to that of Gauss' Law, but for magnetic fields, rather than electric fields. It tells us that the field lines move in a predicable direction – using the “right hand rule” – and how the field is related to an electrical current moving through an object such as a cylindrical wire or a solenoid.

The beauty of the collection of these four equations is in the realisation that the electric constant (K_e) and the magnetic constant (K_m) must be related. Maxwell revealed how. If you divide the electrical constant by the magnetic constant you have the following sum:

$$\begin{aligned} K_e &= 9 \times 10^9 \text{ Nm}^2/\text{c} / K_m = 1 \times 10^{-7} \text{ N s}^2/\text{c} \\ &= 9 \times 10^{16} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}^2 \\ &= 3 \times 10^8 \text{ m/s} \end{aligned}$$

Three times ten to the eight metres per second, or 299,792,458 metres per second, is the speed of light. By this piece of mathematical conjuring, Maxwell was able to show that light was intrinsically related to the phenomena of magnetism and electricity. It was a short step from this to confirming the suspicions of Faraday in his 1846 paper “Thoughts on Ray Vibrations”, that light had a wave-like aspect.^{92 93}

Since 1021 and the *Book of Optics* of Alhazen, through Pierre Gassendi, Issac Newton and on to Pierre-Simon Laplace, the scientific community were more or less united by the theoretical assumption that light consisted of particles, of tiny units or “corpuscles” as Newton calls them.⁹⁴ This created many difficulties for the experimental science community, as the corpuscular theory of light was insufficient to explain experimentally significant phenomena such as refraction and diffusion.⁹⁵ In this regard, people had begun to attempt to explain light as a

⁹² Faraday, Michael, “Thoughts on Ray Vibrations”, *Philosophical Magazine*, May 1846. See also page 44 of Michael Faraday, *Experimental researches in chemistry and physics* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1991).

⁹³ Although Maxwell never found the time to demonstrate the theory experimentally. See J.J. Thomson’s essay “James Clerk Maxwell” (esp. pp. 39-40) in Thomson 1931.

⁹⁴ Christaan Huygens (1629-1695) was a notable exception.

⁹⁵ There were, of course, a number of dissenting voices throughout the centuries between Newton and Maxwell.

wave, as some kind of vibration. It was Maxwell who was finally able to bring together the theories of his peers to discuss light in this way.

Maxwell was perhaps the most respected of 19th century scientists among his peers and followers. Einstein, a man whose reputation suggests a good knowledge of natural science, placed him beside Isaac Newton in importance to physics.⁹⁶ Planck, the man we will discuss next, said of him

There are however in every science certain exceptional individuals, who appear divinely blest, and radiate an influence far beyond the borders of their land and this directly inspire and expedite the research the whole world.
(Thomson 1931 41)

Today, for historians of science such as Simon Schaffer, Maxwell plays a pivotal role in the modern world, finally reckoning up classical mechanics and positivist worldview and opening the possibility – just the possibility, mind you – of study beyond. But he is more important as a facilitator than as a visionary. The electrical engineering textbooks of the early twentieth century cannot be written without the legacy of Maxwell.

⁹⁶ See his essay in Thomson (1931): “Maxwell’s Influence on the Development of the Conception of Physical Reality”, esp. pp. 70 and 72.

That includes, of course, the textbooks of Gadda. We have already seen (above 2.1.3) that Gadda not only studied such textbooks, but kept many of them in his library for fifty years after his formal studies ended. Many people consider the Maxwell equations to be aesthetically pleasing: you can buy t-shirts, posters and artwork featuring the four equations, and for the t-shirt you have a choice of the integral form (modelled by a woman) or the differential (modelled by a man).⁹⁷ Whether or not they qualify as a things of beauty, what is undeniable is the practical use that they could be put to.

How might Gadda have used these equations? It would seem that most engineers use the Maxwell equations to verify and improve on an educated guess. They would have been particularly used when Gadda was working in the Vatican hydro-electric complex, designing circuitry.⁹⁸ He would make a guess about the tolerances, for example, required in the design, then use the equations to refine that guess. The use of the equations brings the precision that is necessary for the engineer to be an engineer, and not a bodger, artisan or magician.

⁹⁷ I leave the study of the gendering of Maxwell's equations to someone more expert in that field.

⁹⁸ Gadda's own "practical and theoretic manual" (Barni, Edoardo. *Elettrotecnica*. Nanni, Brescia: 1922) has large sections on Maxwell and his equations (pages 40-42, the whole of chapters 4, 5 and 10).

Maxwell gives us two things, then: aesthetic object and practical tool. A neat metaphor, perhaps, for Gadda as artist and as scientist. There is, however, no great revolution here. We are still within a world of positivism, of faith in science. Maxwell comes not to abolish physics, but to fulfil it. We are still in a period that can be associated more easily with Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot than Oedipa Maas, as we will see in Chapter 8. Gadda grew up in this atmosphere, when Maxwell's childlike question "Whit's the go o' that?" could be answered without causing an metaphysical grumbling in the cavern of the stomach. "Whit's the particular go o' that?" That question can only be answered with difficulty, as we are about to see.

2: 2 Max Planck

One of the most poetic things about Max Planck (1858-1947) was that he helped to bring down the structure of positivistic, deterministic science by simply adhering to the rules of the system. In his pursuit of answers, he simply collected data and submitted it to the appropriate analysis, following the procedure perhaps best expressed by Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle's Sherlock Holmes: "when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, *however*

improbable, must be the truth" (Doyle 1892 315).⁹⁹ We will have cause to revisit Holmes later.

Planck *does* have some real connection to Carlo Emilio Gadda, albeit a distant one: his graduate student, Max Abraham, taught Gadda at the Politecnico di Milano, and lives on forever in literature as "a Jewish doctor, in reading mathematics at Pastrufazio, and with the aid of calculus" (AG 38) in the famous anecdote of the cat hurled from the third storey. Planck himself was a Christian, from a traditional Protestant background. He seemed almost genetically destined for a career in the academic world, as both his grandfather and great-grandfather were professors of theology and his father a professor of law. He had the talent to study music, had he chosen to do so, but plumped instead for the study of physics. Yet his studies may have never taken off had he followed the advice of a professor on beginning his postgraduate work. According to Lightman,¹⁰⁰ Philipp von Jolly, a professor at Munich, told Planck, "in this field, almost everything is already discovered, and all that remains is to fill a few unimportant holes". Jolly, the inventor of the Jolly Balance for measuring specific gravities, was no fool. As things stood at the time he made his – in

⁹⁹ The italics are in the original.

¹⁰⁰ The anecdote is also recorded in Kragh (1999) p. 3, but von Jolly is not named as the professor, though the year is given as 1875.

hindsight – rash prediction, it was a natural enough assumption that there were only little measurements to be taken, equations to be solved and theories to be proved before the game was up completely. Nor was Planck’s response to this advice unconsidered: he replied that he was interested in understanding the system as it stood, rather than pushing to discover new things. Thankfully, Planck was to later ignore Jolly’s well-intentioned sentiment, and continue with his enquiries. The one for which he is revered today is his work on black body radiation.

The term “black body” is used to refer to an object that would absorb all and any electromagnetic radiation that would fall on it. These are not real objects – there are simulators available now that are 97 to 99% efficient – but theoretic tools invented to fill some of Jolly’s “unimportant holes”.¹⁰¹ Planck’s interest in the black body problem can be traced back to his studies in Berlin in 1877, where he worked with Hermann von Helmholtz and read Rudolf Clausius, who is nowadays best remembered for coining the word “entropy”. It was Clausius’ 1850 paper, “On the Moving Force of Heat and the Laws of Heat which may be

¹⁰¹ See, for example the article authored by Kohei Mizuno, Juntaro Ishii, Hideo Kishida, et al “A black body absorber from vertically aligned single-walled carbon nanotubes” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 106, No. 15. (14 April 2009), pp. 6044-6047.

Deduced Therefrom”¹⁰² that is thought to have inspired Planck to concentrate his studies on heat, and his dissertation, “On the second fundamental theorem of the mechanical theory of heat” is greatly influenced by Clausius’ work. His academic career took off and by 1900 he was Professor of Theoretical Physics at Berlin University, where he remained, despite offers to go elsewhere, until he retired in 1926. Despite his standing and the prestige of the post – his predecessor was Gustav Kirchhoff and his successor Erwin Schrödinger – he is only reckoned to have had twenty graduate students, the aforementioned Abraham among them.

Planck’s direct involvement with black body radiation began some five years before his move to Berlin at the behest of Berlin’s Physikalisch-Technische Reichsanstalt, to provide data to German companies trying to make more efficient lightbulbs (Kragh 59). He had already had some experience of the theories of his friend Gustav Kirchhoff, who had in fact coined the term “black body” in 1862. The challenge now, in the post-Maxwellian world, was to understand the properties of light as it related to heat and other forms of radiation.

¹⁰² Published in English in the *London, Edinburgh and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science* in the July-December 1851 issue (Vol 2, series 4). The German “Über die bewegende Kraft der Wärme” published in *Annalen der Physik* 79: 368–397, 500–524

The black body, as an idealized object, is a tool to allow scientists to answer the question raised by Newton in 1704 in his *Optiks*:

Query 8: Do not all fix'd Bodies, when heated beyond a certain degree, emit Light and shine; and is not this Emission perform'd by the vibrating motion of its parts?
(Newton 2003 340)

Most scientists were of the opinion that Newton was not too far wrong in the above assessment, but it was getting exasperatingly difficult to pin the answer down finally. Planck's work was instrumental in demonstrating both Newton's correct intuition and the shortcomings of the classical mechanics that he had represented for two centuries.

Planck, a theoretical physicist, had in the years 1897 to 1900 published a series of six papers on the irreversible radiation processes in *Annalen der Physik*. These papers contained what Planck had been looking for: a means of deriving Wien's law,

$$\lambda_{\max} = \frac{b}{T}$$

namely that if the spectral distribution of black body radiation was known at one temperature, it could be deduced at any other temperature. This law was

somewhat controversial due to its purely theoretical derivation, and Planck was called to reevaluate his conclusions by experimentalists in Berlin who had discovered that Wien's law only held good for high frequencies and low temperatures.¹⁰³

His work then led him to what he initially considered only an improved version of Wien's law. Today we call it Planck's radiation law.

$$I(\nu, T) = \frac{2h\nu^3}{c^2} \frac{1}{e^{\frac{h\nu}{kT}} - 1}.$$

Now since this derivation was, to Planck, "little more than an inspired guess" (Kragh 1999 61), he now worked hard on understanding the theory behind this equation. For the purposes of our present study, the emphasis should be placed on the occurrence, in two places in the equation, of the symbol h . This letter stands in for the very small amount 0.000000000000000000000000000000663 J/s,¹⁰⁴ and is now considered a fundamental quantity in nature. For Planck, it was initially nothing of the sort: he considered it a mere mathematical convenience. He wrote about it to the American Robert Wood in 1931: "This was a purely formal assumption and I really did not give it much thought

¹⁰³ In the end, Wien's law did yield further fruit: Einstein used it, and not Planck's law, in his 1905 paper on the photoelectric effect.

¹⁰⁴ The quantity is measured in joule-second, or one joule multiplied by a second and used to measure angular momentum or, in this case, the action of an entity.

except that no matter what the cost, I must bring about a positive result.” (Kragh 62). Despite this, the identification of this quantity was a revolution in physics.

Not that Planck, or anyone else, noticed. Planck’s theory was experimentally perfect, but theoretical physicists such as Hendrik A. Lorentz preferred the more theoretically satisfying Rayleigh-Jeans law.¹⁰⁵ ¹⁰⁶ Planck himself resisted the implications of his constant for more than a decade.

What were these implications? Simply put, h tells us that the energy of oscillators can only attain discrete values: there is a certain amount of energy in an electron bound to an atom: a quantum. h tells us why atoms are stable and thus how matter exists. With Planck’s constant is born quantum mechanics.

The above-mentioned Max Abraham, one of only twenty graduate students ever taught by Planck, is himself a neat illustration of the confusion and heterodoxy of the time. Planck may have given birth to quantum mechanics with his work

¹⁰⁵ See Lorentz, H. A. *The principle of relativity : a collection of original memoirs on the special and general theory of relativity*. New York: Dover Publications, 1952

¹⁰⁶ $B_{\lambda}(T) = \frac{2ckT}{\lambda^4}$ is the form of the Rayleigh-Jeans law for wavelength λ , where c is the speed of light, k is the Boltzmann constant and T is the temperature in kelvins (degrees above absolute zero).

on radiation, but that does not mean that all subsequent scientists were to follow his judgment. As I will discuss in section 2.2.4 below, scientific discoveries were treated with suspicion or even rejected outright due to nationalist feeling, political belief or racism. Even if a scientist agreed with some of the new advances in theory, others may prove a step too far. Abraham was able to learn and teach the findings of his mentor and in that sense joined a modern scientific community. On the other hand, he rejected other notions current at the time, and clung on to his worldview for quite a while after the mainstream of opinion had moved on. Abraham was a man who believed in the real existence of the aether or ether - a kind of substance that envelops everything - even after its existence was made doubtful in 1887, even after the work of an Austrian scientist offered a more elegant and simple solution in 1905. The subject is treated in full below, but it is worth asking ourselves what Gadda got from this man, this student of Planck's? Could it be that his personal confusion over the way that the world worked may have itself been passed on to the curious, open-minded Gadda? It seems that Gadda recognized what Heisenberg called "The Crisis of the Materialist Conception" of the world. Did he recognize it in Abraham?

There is evidence in the library of Gadda's books that he continued to be interested in Planck's theories – and, importantly, the implications of these theories – long after finishing his studies and long after devoting himself to writing. A particularly sound example is Mario Viscardini's *La Struttura dell'universo* published in 1953. In this book, several sections are given over to calculations and discussions based on Planck's Constant and his quantum theory.¹⁰⁷ While Gadda has left no notes in the margins of this book, it is fully cut and appears to have been well-used: if he did read Viscardini, it would be essential for him to have more than a passing interest in Planck. Another of Gadda's books, De Broglie's *I quanti e la fisica moderna* (1938), devotes space and time to the discussion of Planck's importance. In the introduction, De Broglie says:

Finchè i fisici ignoravano l'esistenza dei quanti, nulla potevano comprendere dell'intima e profonda natura dei fenomeni fisici, perché senza quanti non sarebbe né luce né materia, e, se è lecito parafrasare un testo evangelico, si può dire che nulla di quello che è stato fatto è stato fatto senza di essi.
(Broglie 11)

The importance of Planck's discovery – not fully understood even by Planck himself at the time – places him among the essential figures of modern physics.

¹⁰⁷ See especially note 1 to Chapter Four (p 58) and the section on electron rays (74-79).

2: 3 Albert Einstein

The man who swung a wrecking ball into Max Abraham's "ether" is one who needs no introduction. Albert Einstein is without a doubt the best-known scientist of the twentieth century, his name has become a byword for intellectual ability. His biography is the stuff of legend: that he was slow at school, stuck his tongue out at photographers and invented relativity is known by everyone.

Not all we "know" about Einstein is strictly true, of course. He was not especially excellent at high school, but he was not the dunce that dunces (and the parents of dunces) sometimes suggest he was. The reason for attributing under-achievement to him relates chiefly to his inability to get a place at University to continue his studies, a situation that might have had just as much to do with ethnicity as with perceived intellectual ability. Nor did he invent relativity. The concept was first expounded by Galileo Galilei in 1638, in his work *Discorsi e dimonstrazioni matematiche, intorno a due nuove scienze*.¹⁰⁸ Simply put, relativity, or Galilean invariance, as it is sometimes called, is the idea that the laws of physics are the same in all inertial frames. If you are on a boat, below deck, you can perform physics experiments and not know that the boat is

¹⁰⁸ *Discourses and Mathematical Demonstrations Relating to Two New Sciences*, also called simply *The Two New Sciences*.

moving swiftly on a calm sea. Einstein took this theory and moved it to the extremes of science, to high speeds, to the speed of light. He called his theory the Special Theory of Relativity.

2: 3 a Relativity

The Special Theory of Relativity was expounded in one of five papers published in the year 1905. These papers were to have such an effect on the world of science that it is worth detailing them here. The Special Theory of Relativity was laid out in the paper “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies” which was published in the *Annalen der Physik* on 30th September 1905.¹⁰⁹ It is the third of the papers of Einstein’s annus mirabilis.¹¹⁰ In the paper, Einstein notes that the Maxwell equations (as discussed above) work very well except when applied to the case of bodies in motion. This was not a new observation, and in fact there had been theoretical attempts to “fix” the equations by the postulation of an “aether” (the preferred modern spelling is “ether”) or massless medium that pervades all of space. The Dutchman Hendrik Lorentz (1852-1928) is the

¹⁰⁹ The German title of the paper is “Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper”.

¹¹⁰ I use this term, and will continue to use it in the following discussion, in the knowledge that its use is disliked by some in the scientific community. Some, like Stachel (1998) think it is better used to refer to Newton’s *anni mirabiles* (1664-1666). Others prefer to use the translation “miraculous year” as it avoids the use of Latin. But annus mirabilis is a term well enough known in English usage. Cfr Larkin’s 1967 poem in *High Windows* and Queen Elizabeth II’s coining of “annus horribilis”.

figure most closely associated with the ether theory today because of his “Theory of Electrons”, although his work came after a duo of American scientists, Albert Michelson and Edward Morley failed to find evidence of a “luminiferous aether” in the 1887 Michelson-Morley Experiment. In the paper of 30th September, Einstein invoked the principle of relativity and combined it with the theory, inherent in the Maxwell equations, that the speed of light is a constant, regardless of its source. This leads to the paradoxical conclusion that the velocity of light must be the same in all inertial frames.

This is a big deal, not because the parts that make up the theory are new, but because Einstein uses ideas that were common knowledge to all scientists combined in a way that undermined the very framework that the theories had been based on.¹¹¹ In combining the idea that the speed of light was a constant and the principle of relativity, Einstein introduced a new age of science, a new way of thinking about time. Under the conditions described by Einstein, it is time itself that is relative, dependant upon the velocity of the observer. Now we

¹¹¹ The fact that these theories were well-known to all at the time is, I believe, the reason that Einstein did not give the usual bibliographical references to other papers in the field. In this paper he mentions only Newton, Maxwell, Lorentz, Heinrich Hertz and Christian Doppler as influences. My conjecture is that beyond these, Einstein considered detailed references unnecessary as the facts he dealt in would be accepted by any of his readers. For a contrary perspective, and the controversy on the link to Henri Poincaré, see Darrigol (2000) and (2004), Galison (2003) and Stachel (1998).

have atomic clocks that can measure the slowing of time on, for example, supersonic aircraft, but this fact of nature is still difficult to accept: it runs completely contrary to our lived experience.¹¹²

The other papers Einstein published in that year have less of a grip, perhaps, on our collective consciousness, but still represent essential developments in the field of physics.

The 1905 paper that can claim to have been written first is the one dealing with molecular dimensions. In fact, a version of this paper (as a dissertation submitted to the University of Zurich) dates back to 1901.¹¹³ Known in English as “A New Determination of Molecular Dimensions” and published in August 1905, this paper sets out Einstein’s findings based on the measurement of viscosity in a sugar solution. Important as it was for the time, the measurements that Einstein made were soon corrected and improved by others. In terms of a theoretical breakthrough, it is best considered together with his May 1905 paper, “Über die von der molekularkinetischen Theorie der Wärme geforderte

¹¹² The Hafele and Keating Experiment showed time dilation on jet aircraft as early as October 1971.

¹¹³ Although the paper was submitted in 1901, Einstein withdrew it early in 1902 and did not resubmit it until 20th July 1905. The paper, slightly modified, was then published in *Annalen der Physik* as described.

Bewegung von in ruhenden Flüssigkeiten suspendierten Teilchen" ("On the movement of small particles suspended in a stationary liquid demanded by the molecular-kinetic theory of heat"). This work is normally referred to as the paper on Brownian Motion.

2: 3 b Brownian Motion

Brownian Motion is a phenomenon named for the Scottish botanist Robert Brown. It involves a seemingly random movement of particles suspended in a liquid or gas. The effect is mentioned in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, as the common sight of dust particles in a shaft of sunlight.¹¹⁴ This effect is at least partly due to Brownian Motion, though air currents play a significant part in the spectacle.

More easily isolated is the presence of microscopic particles in a liquid. Brown himself was observing pollen particles in water when he noticed their shaky motion. Repeating his experiment with dust particles, he ruled out the supposition that the pollen could be in some sense automotive or alive. He set out his thoughts in a private paper, "A brief account of microscopical

¹¹⁴ Lucretius' work is, as might perhaps be expected, present in Gadda's library as preserved in the Fondo Burcardo.

observations made in the months of June, July and August, 1827, on the particles contained in the pollen of plants; and on the general existence of active molecules in organic and inorganic bodies” that was later published in *The New Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* (pp 358-371, July-September 1828). He left the cause of the motion a mystery, rejecting the idea that it could be as a result of currents in the water or its evaporation and instead earnestly suggests critics may want to try it for themselves:

The insufficiency of the most important of those [possible explanations] enumerated may, I think, be satisfactorily shown by means of a very simple experiment.
(Brown 482)

The problem became known to mathematicians such as Thorvald N. Theile and Louis Bachelier, but it was up to Einstein to bring the phenomenon to the attention of physicists. In his paper on Brownian Motion, Einstein came up with a solution that again linked two different ideas: Brownian Motion in fluids was caused by the presence of atoms.

We who work in the arts and humanities half of C.P. Snow’s great divide often fail to see the relevance of Einstein’s (indirect) proof of an atomic world, pointing out that Democritus and the above mentioned Lucretius (and indeed the Epicurean school) had sorted the whole thing out long ago. That attitude

ignores the very real and vehement debate surrounding the atom theory in the early part of the 20th century. Ludwig Boltzmann, a prominent atomist, committed suicide in 1905, reportedly because of attacks on his theories by non-atomists.

Gadda himself gave some thought to the nature of the atom, albeit in a philosophical sense, rather than one directly connected with physics. His *Meditazione milanese* contains a section on “L’atomo e l’infinito”. Perhaps his reason for writing this section was due to not only Einstein’s demonstration of the physical existence of the atom, but also that the constituent parts of the atom had begun to be discovered: Rutherford demonstrated the existence of the proton in 1919. If it seemed to Gadda that the fact that the fundamental building blocks of nature were becoming smaller and smaller was a problem for the philosopher, he has an elegant solution to the issue, which he states economically as that of the *definition* of the atom. This is not an idle distinction for Gadda: “Insisto su questo: l’espressione prende la mano al pensiero: e il barocco e il pleistocenico *témno*, se era degno di Anassimandro, non è degno di Lord Kelvin” [I insist on this: the expression leads thought by the hand: and the baroque and the Pleistocenic *témno*, even if it were good enough for

Anaximander, is not good enough for Lord Kelvin] (MM SVP xxx). His solution is to treat the atom as if it were the smallest possible constituent of a system: “così l’atomo è l’evanescente logico, cioè quel così piccolo logico che permane integro o vergine e non ulteriormente decomposto rispetto al sistema” [In this way, the “atom” is the logical evanescence, or that so small thing logically required that remains whole, virgin and is not later broken down in the system] (MM SVP xxx). This is an interesting conclusion for us as readers of Gadda’s fiction, as it suggests a way that the personality of Gonzalo Pirobutirro might find in a philosophical discourse a resolution to his “double-mindedness”; his desire to live both the world of the engineer and the Aristotelian, or simply the answer to the cognitive dissonance they experience when they experience a world – the social world – that is too complex. But more of that anon.

Besides this, Einstein showed that his theory confirmed the kinetic model of heat theories. His work in this paper went a long way to establishing the second law of thermodynamics as a statistical, mathematical model for the way in which the world works.

2: 3 c The Photoelectric Effect

The first of the annus mirabilis papers was “On a heuristic viewpoint concerning the production and transformation of light”,¹¹⁵ a paper that confirmed – indirectly – Planck’s discoveries in terms of light quanta. The ideas contained in this paper had a curious career: as late as 1922, Niels Bohr remained skeptical about the application of the theory, while it is specifically this paper that is mentioned in the citation for Einstein’s Nobel Prize.¹¹⁶ The theory seems to be, aptly enough, both accepted and unacceptable at the same time.

Einstein did not build on Planck’s theories as set out above, but instead used Wien’s Law as a starting point. He noticed that light at a low frequency would not excite electrons, but that high frequency light would, even at low intensity. From this arose the conjecture that light traveled in discrete packets whose energy depends upon the frequency, and that only light above a certain wavelength could excite an electron.

¹¹⁵ “Über einen die Erzeugung und Verwandlung des Lichtes betreffenden heuristischen Gesichtspunkt”, *Annalen der Physik* 17; 132-148 (1905)

¹¹⁶ Bohr said in his address on winning the 1922 Nobel Prize for Physics, “The hypothesis of light-quanta is not able to throw light on the nature of radiation.” The feeling of most scientists that the light-quanta hypothesis was useful for describing the nature of radiation was responsible for Einstein winning the same prize the year before.

In the paper, he goes on to offer a comparison to Planck's theory that light could only be emitted in packets of energy hf , where h is Planck's constant and f the frequency.

2: 3 d Eee equals emm cee squared

If the Special Theory of Relativity stoked the layman's imagination, the fourth of the 1905 papers, "Does the Inertia of a Body depend on its Energy Content?",¹¹⁷ gave him a shorthand way of expressing the unfathomable codes of the intelligentsia. The paper, published in *Annalen der Physik* on the 27th of September 1905, does not actually put the idea that the energy of a body at rest (E) equals its mass (m) times the speed of light (c) squared into the now world-famous expression. Instead Einstein sows the seeds of this idea by pointing out that if a body gives off energy (he uses the symbol L in this paper) its mass will decrease by L/c^2 . Einstein's notes the influence of both James Clerk Maxwell and Heinrich Rudolf Hertz's investigations.

The Maxwell Hertz equations for empty space, together with the Maxwellian expression for the electromagnetic energy of space and in addition the principle that: *The laws by which the states of physical systems alter are independent of the alternative, to which of two systems of coordinates, in uniform motion of parallel translation relatively to each other, these alterations of state are referred (principle of relativity).*
(Einstein and Renn 4)

¹¹⁷ "Ist die Trägheit eines Körpers von seinem Energieinhalt abhängig?" *Annalen der Physik* 18: 639-641

The paper goes on to assert that mass of a body is a measure of its energy content. It is a more or less logical extension of Maxwell's discovery that electricity, magnetism and the speed of light are all related, once special relativity is brought to bear on the question. The particular genius of Einstein here is that he has found connections were none previously existed, built on these, and found a way to derive these results in an independent way. In the words of Stachel:

He employs one theory – Maxwell's electrodynamics – to find the limits of validity of another – Newtonian Mechanics – even though he was already aware of the limited validity of the former. One of the major accomplishments of Einstein's approach .. is that relative kinematics is independent of the theories that impelled its formulation... Einstein had created a theory of principle, rather than a constructive theory.
(Stachel 1998 18-9)

It is difficult to overstate the importance that these papers would have for the future of physics, and with the work of other scientists, including Maxwell and Planck, the scene was set for a revolution in the world of physics, just at the time when Gadda was to begin his training at the Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano. But what was the reaction to these discoveries? How were these new, outlandish theories received? What did it all mean?

2: 4 The Meaning of It All

Such is the status of the scientist today – the Creationism/Darwinism debate notwithstanding – it is difficult for us to conceive of the scale of opposition that these scientific findings could provoke, both in the political and scientific realm. The persecution of Einstein, for example, by the National Socialists in Germany after 1933 is well documented.¹¹⁸ Less often do we hear about general anti-Semitism or anti-German bias preventing scientists and politicians refusing to accept results or theories.

I have had cause to mention the general air of anti-Semitism in German universities of the late 19th century,¹¹⁹ but the rejection of scientific research on the grounds of political distinctions was not unique to Germany by any means. Taking Einstein's relativity as an example, let us look at the various ways that the cutting edge of science made it into the scientific and, later, general mainstream.

¹¹⁸ Einstein left Germany as Hitler came to power, and his books were among those burnt by the Nazis. Isaacson (2007) reports further outrages, such as a bounty of \$5000 dollars on his life and inclusion on a list of enemies of the German state (Isaacson 404-406).

¹¹⁹ See above.

In France and Italy, the response to the theory of special relativity was almost total silence. In fact, by 1924 there had only been 215 publications on the subject in Italy, compared with 1435 in Germany and 1150 in the United Kingdom.¹²⁰ This is perhaps why Gadda's library contained the French translation (by J. Rouvière) of Einstein's general relativity, and books like James Phinney Baxter's *Scientists Against Time* and Arthur Stanley Eddington's *Stars and Atoms* translated into Italian: there were precious few books that dealt with cutting edge science being written by Italians. The reasons for this are difficult to pin down, but fear of Germany's unified strength, military and technological, may have made it difficult to accept the findings of German scientists. In France, we have the old story of hang-ups with anti-Semitism at all levels of society that is so well illustrated by the case of the Dreyfus Affair, still rumbling on when Einstein's *annus mirabilis* papers were published. Whatever the reasons for the silence of the French and Italian physicists, there was little of the outright denial that could be seen in other nations.

In the United States, for example, a concerted attempt was made to ignore the implications of the theory. The first serious American study, Lewis and

¹²⁰ Cfr Kragh (1999) pp 100-102.

Tolman's 1909 paper "The Principle of Relativity, and Non-Newtonian Mechanics"¹²¹ realises that classical mechanics are not sufficient to describe special relativity, but still clings to a positivistic point of view. As the authors say in the conclusion:

It is in order to maintain [the] fundamental conservation laws, and to reconcile them with the Principle of Relativity, which rests on the experiments of Michelson and Morley, and of Bucherer, that we have adopted the principles of non-Newtonian Mechanics.

These principles, bizarre as they may appear, offer the only method of preserving the science of mechanics substantially in its present form.

(Lewis & Tolman 1909)

Other scientists did not even attempt this kind of synthesis, but stood against the theory from Germany on political grounds. William Francis Magie, a founder and president of the American Physical Society, argued against special relativity in 1912 on the basis that fundamental physical theories "must be intelligible to everybody, to the common man as well as the trained scholar," while apparently believing that "all previous physical theories have been thus intelligible." (Kragh 102) In Russia, the theory was enthusiastically discussed until it was rejected after the Bolshevik revolution in the name of dialectical materialism. In the UK, it was not until Arthur Stanley Eddington's 1919 field

¹²¹ http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Principle_of_Relativity,_and_Non-Newtonian_Mechanics. Accessed 10th November 2011.

trip to confirm the theory of general relativity that the theory became widely discussed, although there were, as with Lewis and Tolman above, attempts to discuss the theory of special relativity in terms of classical mechanics.¹²²

In the world of the layman, the theory of special relativity was used and abused. It was easy to reject special relativity on the grounds that it was ethically undesirable: every first year philosophy student can formulate the proposition “there is no proposition that is true” in order to reduce to absurdity the theory of relativism, so why not relativity? This armchair Socratic method is mocked by commentators on the subject such as Kragh who records:

Nonscientists who, more often than not, thoroughly misunderstood the theory and discussed its implications were it could not be legitimately applied. Some authors “applied” relativity to art theory, some to psychological theories, and still others drew wide ranging philosophical consequences from Einstein’s theory.
(Kragh 98)

A good example of this is the brilliant Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who attempts to use Einstein’s theory as some kind of scientific framework for his own Perspectivism.¹²³ His paper “El sentido histórico de la teoría de

¹²² Cfr Cunningham 1914

¹²³ Dobson 1989.

Einstein”¹²⁴ (The Historic Significance of Einstein’s theory) is an attempt to locate his own theories in terms of the history of “relativity”: the same all-encompassing word that, as I have indicated, covers all from Galileo to Eddington.

La teoría de Einstein es una maravillosa justificación de la multiplicidad armónica de todos los puntos de vista. Amplíese esa idea a lo moral y a lo estético, y se tendrá una nueva manera de sentir la historia y la vida.
(Gasset III, 237)

The theory of Einstein is a marvelous proof of the harmonious multiplicity of all points of view. If the idea is extended to morality and aesthetics, we shall find a new way of experiencing history and life.

Kragh may well be right to scoff at this kind of “misunderstanding”, and he is quite right to protest that when he says that the theories of Einstein are applied to areas in which they have no legitimacy. It is quite wrong to say that Einstein’s description of the world as dependant on the frame of reference of the observer *means* that any particular philosophical point of view is scientifically proven. It is however, equally wrong-headed to say, as Kragh, Stachel, and

¹²⁴ <http://www.librosggratisweb.com/html/ortega-y-gasset-jose/el-sentido-historico-de-la-teoria-de-einstein/index.htm>. Accessed 10th November 2011. The work is also available in *Obras Completas* vol III, p 231. The work is undated and would seem to have been published for the first time in around 1923. Like many of Ortega’s works, however, it is difficult to say how long the essay existed in the form of notes for lectures before it was written down for publication. It is published in English as part of *The Modern Theme* (New York, 1961).

Miller do, that any philosophical speculation that follows from the consideration of this theory is without value. In fact, it is the – sometimes flawed – interpretation of such theories that inspire great works of art and literature in the twentieth century. In this I find myself disagreeing most strongly with Miller who (in an otherwise fascinating book) seems to believe that anyone interested in postmodernism is one step from “feminist science” and “witches, druids, ecofeminists and other modern pagans”, and he dismisses the complaint of Václav Havel that “science, with its usual coolness, can describe the different ways it can kill us all” as nonsensical without offering any solace to those of us who worry that the logic of instrumental rationality might not be the best way to run our lives. He mocks the “postmodernists who in their critique of science display an abysmal lack of scientific acumen” which is like complaining that atheists are ungodly. Miller concentrates on the visual arts, as these are the ones that most closely fit his thesis that science and art are expressions of the same creative instinct, while he mostly ignores literary authors, except in ridiculing their opposition to the “dark satanic mills” of the Industrial Revolution. Nowhere in his book is an indication that art can be born, like Kafka’s, like Dicken’s, out of a fear of the instrumental rationality that gives us mobile phones and CAT scans. Gadda fills in a strange position in this: a writer who

loves and respects the mathematics, enjoys the practical benefits of technology but manages still to alert us to the difficult place that the human spirit finds itself in once these theories filter into our culture.

I have selected the special theory of relativity to look at in depth because it has inserted itself into our culture. In Gadda's time it had a certain fame already, and its history is easy to trace. That is not to say that the work of Maxwell and Planck were not without their impact. In fact, for Gadda, the work of Maxwell in particular was, without a doubt, fundamental to his day job as an engineer. Planck, meanwhile, grew to realize that his theory of black body radiation held troubling consequences that would not be fully spelled out until 1927 and Werner Heisenberg's "Über den anschaulichen Inhalt der quantentheoretischen Kinematik und Mechanik".¹²⁵ The formulation of the principle that the measurement of the position of a particle disturbs its momentum, and vice versa (the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle), is philosophically and theoretically related to Planck's discovery. As I have shown above, there is a logical progression from the Maxwell equations to Einstein's 1905 papers: the equation that Maxwell makes between light and the mass of the electron allows Einstein to work out the $E=mc^2$ formula. Planck's quanta lead to Einstein's work on the

¹²⁵ *Zeitschrift für Physik* 43: 172–198. English translation: J. A. Wheeler and H. Zurek, *Quantum Theory and Measurement* Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 62–84.

photoelectric effect, while answering a problem raised by Maxwell and pointing forward to Bohr's work on allowed electron orbits and quantum leaps. It is simply the case that anyone with sufficient wit to understand and follow any of these developments is suitably placed to understand the history and the ongoing development of the field of physics, and, yes, to make use of these theories in interesting and creative ways.

2: 5 The Artist and The Scientist

In this section I argue for the usefulness of the interpretation of science on the part of the non-specialist, and how the fertile misinterpretation of new ideas and theories might help to produce art. Gadda does not fall into the camp of the non-specialist entirely, but the argument will hold for his case as well. Let me speak generally, and somewhat speculatively, first. A curious power is present in the scientific formulations that I have just described. A power that does not arise simply from their application, but instead a power that their very formulation invests in the human imagination. Art has always been an alternative form of communication, valid when natural speech cannot take the strain of expression. It is in the act of devising such a formula as:

$$\oint_S \mathbf{B} \cdot d\mathbf{A} = 0$$

that the will to art is set free, because at the moment we prove that the magnetic monopole cannot exist, we recognise that the possibility of its existence was dependent on our formulation of such a theory. We can only discuss its non-existence because we, the imagining humans, have conjured it into being. There is no incidence of it in nature; the natural language of the world cannot express it. There remains only the idea of the world as it is not, and the only way that can be expressed is through the artist. Before the formulation of Gauss' law for magnetism, there was no existence, in any sense, for the monopole. The law dismisses it from the real world, trapping it in a state of imagination, reduced to absurdity. I read with interest that the existence of monopoles is today considered

one of the safest bets that one can make about physics not yet seen. It is very hard to predict when and if monopoles will be discovered. If their mass is at the grand unified scale as one expects, then they will be beyond the reach of accelerators, while inflation has almost certainly diluted any primordial monopoles beyond discovery. It is curious to contemplate this unfortunate situation, where theory predicts the existence of an object (and its production, but in experiments that can only be carried out in thought) and at the same time suggests that it may never be seen. But we must continue to hope that we will be lucky, or unexpectedly clever, some day.
(Polchinski)

This re-evaluation of the phenomenon is, of course, outside the scope of the world that Gadda inhabited (and given that it is written by a renowned String Theoretician, perhaps outside of our world too),¹²⁶ but the fact that it can be re-evaluated at all proves my point. The monopole can only exist – for now, at least – in the imagination (“experiments that can only be carried out in thought”), and it is the construction of the equation that denies it that brought it into that kind of existence.

The same can be said of the quantum leap that I have mentioned: not one of us is born with the knowledge that not all electron orbits are permitted, we each need to learn this basic fact about the world and the way it works. But who among us can say upon learning this information that they yearn not for the rogue electron that floats between, rebelling against the laws of physics as Lucifer against the will of God, a renegade lepton that cries “Non serviam!” It cannot be, except in human imagination, wherein with our denial we recognise the reality of the impossible.

¹²⁶ String theory is not universally accepted by theoretical physicists, some of whom lament a perceived lack of predictive power in the theory. For more detail see Muller (2007) chapter 11, or, for a satirical take on the problem, see the webcomic xkcd at <http://xkcd.com/171/>. A good textbook supporting String theory is written by Polchinsky himself: *String Theory*, published by Cambridge University Press (1999). The current Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge is a string theorist, Michael Green.

Let me continue with some further circumstantial evidence in favour of my thesis. In the two, maybe three decades that I have just discussed in terms of scientific revolution, the arts underwent a revolution that was similar in impact and scope. Miller (2001) identifies this parallel in his work on Einstein and Picasso, stating that “astounding developments in science, mathematics and technology contributed to the very definition of ‘avant garde’” (Miller 211). He goes on to argue that as “it has long been known that the roots of science were never totally within science itself. Why then should the roots of [an] art movement [...] lie totally within art?” (ibid) There is an interplay between the two, art and science, though we often speak about their genealogies as separate. Picasso was standing on the shoulders of giants, just as Einstein was. With Maxwell we can pair Cezanne and “primitive art”, with Plank, Freud and Nietzsche. It is difficult to go back in history and link so many great names to any scientific revolution, though we may hazard (and this only hazily) Homer and the smelting of iron, Dante and the double-entry bookkeeping system, Newton and Pope, perhaps. Such conjecture is difficult just because it is not in the way of artists to present to us their sources and inspirations, which presents us with the difficult matter of biography, or autobiography. As Arnheim asks,

“how then are we to discover what takes place when a work of art is created? We can listen to what the artist reports about himself.” Besides, I would sustain that artists would not have to be conscious of these influences for them to affect their output; it is certainly not necessary for them to fully understand the implications of the scientific changes that affect the society they find themselves in.

For most thinkers, it is enough to point out that science changes society and that the society changes artist output, perhaps through some aethereal force, allied to the weak nuclear, the strong nuclear, the electromagnetic forces and gravity. “Taste” is one possible name for such a force, and we expect to show its working through speculation such as I have just indulged in. This is, unsurprisingly, not enough for most interested parties.

Other scholars will point out the same societal changes and discuss them in purely economic or socio-economic terms. For example, the Divine Comedy is the result of the wealth of Florence in the 13th century. This bald statement may be easily granted, but the curious mind might want to know how the process works and why it should be so.

My attitude is slightly different to both these approaches: the artist cannot stand outside of society, nor can the artist's output be created outwith a context. But there is something other than "taste" working in the unfolding, the progression¹²⁷ of art, and it involves more than money.

In the case that interests us in the present work, the artists, scientists and philosophers are too close together in time for us to speak of socio-economic forces, or changes in taste. Nor are these forces dynamic enough to make the developments that we associate with the likes of Eliot, Joyce or Gadda. The force is the flow of information. It can only be this: the speed at which ideas are expressed, information changes hands, thoughts are transmitted. Information, furthermore, is different from knowledge. Knowledge requires some kind of an understanding on the part of both parties, while information is neutral: the term implies no understanding, or even reception. Planck and Einstein could share knowledge as they were both trained in the same discipline, but anyone can be inspired by the information that is thus generated. Information is therefore fundamental to the society that receives both the scientific research paper and

¹²⁷ This word is intended to mean only progression in a chronological sense.

the modernist canvas. We do not have to understand the uncertainty principle to read Pynchon anymore than the calculus is necessary for us to sing “Jerusalem” or write in free verse.

I earlier noted that it is easy to dismiss, as some scientific writers do, philosophical uses of barely understood scientific theory. I mentioned Ortega y Gasset in this category. But that was hardly fair. In fact, Ortega shows himself more than capable of understanding the import of Einstein’s theories.¹²⁸ He is not deeply interested in the mathematics of the situation, but instead what they mean for the human race. That is not folly: it is genuine interest in the human condition. My contention – that once these things are known they change the way we think, and that changing the way we think changes our lives – is stated forcefully and intelligently in Ortega’s work time and again. As he says in a review of Max Born’s *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* (Dover, 1962):

La teoría de la relatividad es, entre nuevas ideas, la que ha ingresado con más estruendo en la atención del gran público. La razón de ello está en que los pensamientos de la física tienen la ventaja de poder fácilmente ser contrasados con las realidades en ellos pensadas. Esto da a sus aciertos una evidencia patética y triunfal. La docilidad de la estrella remotísima a la meditación de un hombre será siempre el

¹²⁸ Not just the special, but also the general theory of relativity is discussed in the essay “El sentido histórico de la teoría de Einstein”. Perhaps the essay was written in the wave of publicity that followed Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington’s expedition to prove the general theory in 1919.

hecho ejemplar en que el espíritu popular renueva su fe en ciencia.
(Ortega 1946 IV, 308)

The theory of relativity is, amongst new ideas, the one that has arrived with the most noise, catching the attention of the public. The reason for this is that the ideas of physics have the advantage of being contrasted easily with the realities they come from. This gives to its correct answers a pathetic and triumphal evidence. The meekness of the very remote star of a man's meditation will always be the model in which the popular spirit renews its faith in science.

I agree with Ortega. Art speaks to us of the most important things in our lives, those things that cannot be captured in an equation. The proliferation of wars, suicides, weddings and feasts throughout human history stand to us as a reminder that nothing of real consequence can be decided by instrumental rationality, for all that I am grateful for my eyeglasses and my laptop computer.

Gadda gives us an excellent opportunity to examine the crossover between the scientific knowledge of the early 20th century and the information that it generates. His position is not that of a theoretical physicist, but a professional engineer. He is removed from the cutting edge of research, but is in the right place to receive the backslash from the waves that were made by the great physicists of his time. For our purposes, we might even consider this very crossover as a catalyst for Gadda's writing itself.

3: The Scientific Detective

Gadda, we have seen, is in an ideal position to understand and make use of the science of the early twentieth century in terms of literature. Like many Europeans, his life had been profoundly disrupted by The Great War, and like many Europeans, he had returned home to find that things were no longer the same. The horrors of the War were one thing, but the uncertainty that was spreading throughout the intellectual circles of the world was also due to the subtler, slower changes in the way science was understood. In my opinion, Gadda gravitated towards the murder mystery genre as one of a possible set of solutions to the disconnection he felt with the world. The mystery genre had been established at the end of the 1800s, and underwent a variety of changes in the twentieth century, some of which I will explain below. Gadda does not fit easily into the canon of detective writers because his murder mystery novels – and we may even query the use of that label – *Quer pasticciaccio* and (although this appellation is disputable) *Cognizione del dolore* are incomplete by the rules of the genre, whatever their value as literature.¹²⁹ It is perfectly natural that Gadda should attempt to write detective fiction as it is the literature that most perfectly fits the spirit of the era. Just as when we think of the early literatures of Europe,

¹²⁹ While I agree with Pecoraro and Pietropaoli that we are invited to read *Cognizione del dolore* as a murder mystery, I accept that the case is yet to be made completely convincing.

we think of the great epics, the mediaeval period gave us the poetry of the troubadours, the 1700s and 1800s saw the flourishing of the novel, when it comes time to evaluate the literary tradition of the twentieth century, we will be talking about detective fiction. This genre may have origins that predate the latter half of the 19th century, although that is itself debateable, but it is in the 1890s and 20th century that we recognise it in the form that has become familiar today. In this chapter I intend to show how the changes in worldview discussed in the previous chapters impact on the detective genre, how the way that the genre is written changes over time, and what the relevance of that might be for us as students of Gadda and students of literature more generally. The fact that Gadda saw himself as belonging to a tradition to the extent that he wrote detective fiction allows us to take a wider view of the genre as we close in on our target. Let us begin, if not at the beginning, then at least at a very good place to start.

3: 1 Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes is not the first detective in fiction, but he is probably the best known. I am not concerned here with an exhaustive study of the genre but with tracing out a line that will interest us as we seek to examine changes and developments through our culture. Holmes is an excellent start for us: in his

manner, his language and his actions he represents the late Victorian sensibility that gave us so much of our modern world. Conan Doyle printed his first Holmes story in 1887 and his last in 1914, spanning the time from Victoria's golden jubilee and the outbreak of war in Europe. A period, of course, that marks the high point of Britain's Empire and the confident positivist scientific outlook that the British Ruling Classes carried with them to India, Zululand and Ireland. As it is particularly in cultural attitude to scientific method and information that I am interested - or rather, it is the very mindset that gave such confidence in the scientific method that drives my enquiry - Holmes stands as a shining example. He is not as some kind of fortuneteller or wizard, but of the scientific method properly applied. In "The Adventure of the Dancing Men", a short story first published in 1903, Holmes explains the simplicity of his brainwork, expressing it in the terms of logic.

"It is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly a meretricious, effect."
(Doyle 1905 33)

Holmes puts all his faith in the logical processes that make up his world. He is an ideal positivist, able to calmly understand the world by careful observation.

We note, however, that he has no desire to catalogue all the knowledge of the world: completeness is not the issue. Note his reaction in the first chapter of *A Study In Scarlet* to Watson's attempt to expand his knowledge. It is safe to say that he has no interest in philosophising about that which does not concern him: he is not even interested in the fact that the Earth orbits the sun, rather than the other way round. For Holmes, extraneous details are just that: extraneous. Holmes requires nothing but the relevant facts. Once the data have been acquired, they are processed. That leaves us only the solution. As he says to Watson in *The Sign of Four*:

“You will not apply my precept,” he said, shaking his head. “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?”

(Doyle 1890 34)

The science historian and Holmes fan Soshichi Uchii suggests that Conan Doyle was inspired in this facet of Holmes' personality by the English logician and economist W.S. Jevons, and I am inclined to agree. Another nomination for the title of “real-life Sherlock Holmes” is the celebrated Edinburgh physician Joseph Bell. These men are very much of the period, positivists and logicians both. It is worth wondering whether the positivistic bent of Holmes and the certainty that such a mindset promises is what attracted Gadda to Conan Doyle's writing, as it

attracts so many even today. Whether that is the case or not it is certainly clear that Holmes belongs very much to his own time and the positivism and scientific certainty that he represents endures not long beyond the date of his retirement. Holmes becomes a beekeeper in 1903 on the Sussex Downs, and just two years later, as we have seen, Einstein changed the world. There is a continuation in the tradition, a “Golden Age” of detective fiction that endures far beyond Holmes’ retirement, however, and it was perhaps this that Gadda was most interested in becoming part of when he wrote his *Quer pasticciaccio*. But the tradition continues after Holmes.

3: 2 Christie and Sayers

The most successful of all detective writers is, of course, Agatha Christie. I include alongside her Dorothy L. Sayers, who is known to my contemporaries as much as a translator of Dante as a novelist. I combine these two in this section because they represent together a period of time that has become known as the Golden Age of detective fiction. It is also the translations of these novelists that first made a huge impact in the Italian market, in the Giallo Mondadori editions that first appeared in 1929. Mystery novels had been read by the Italian public before, of course, but it was the novels of the likes of Christie, Ellery Queen and Sayers that reached the mass market. In Britain, the

detective novel, or “whodunnit”¹³⁰ was an important part of culture. As Barnard remarks, “in 1926 the detective story was the national bingo, the national *Coronation Street*, the national Match of the Day” (Barnard 8). There are a vast number of writers and an even vaster number of books dating from this period, so I will restrict myself to just a few general observations. Undoubtedly, it was this kind of detective writing that Gadda had in mind when he set out to use the giallo as a framework for both his *Quer pasticciaccio* and his *Cognizione del dolore*. For us to understand why these books do not, in the end, follow this framework, it is helpful to outline some of the nuances of the genre.

Firstly, the Golden Age of detective fiction relies upon the amateur detective. Men like Hercule Poirot and Lord Peter Wimsey and women like Miss Marple and Ariadne Oliver, who take on cases not because it is their job – though they do appear to be paid on occasion – but for the interest in the case, a quasi-vigilante desire to see justice done, at the request of a friend, or to play a kind of matchmaker, bringing lovers together. This last motivation of the detective is surprisingly common: two notable examples are *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) and *Unnatural Death* (1927), by Christie and Sayers, respectively.

¹³⁰ The word “whodunnit” was coined by the American playwright George Simon Kaufman in 1925.

Secondly, the novels are very often projected back slightly in time, to a period before the First World War. This is especially true of Christie's writing, but both she and Sayers choose to hark back to a simpler time and look upon the Great War with horror. In Sayers case, this is often a somewhat sardonic and deliberate "rose-tinted" look back, but Lord Peter himself is a relic of the time, his army batman Bunter by his side, his friends shattered by the experience of the war.

Thirdly, there is not much in the way of literary pretention in these novels: they are set up principally to puzzle the reader and to give a sense of satisfaction at its resolution. This is probably why people like Raymond Chandler find the English detective novel so irritating and twee. In a novel like *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, for example, the plot depends, among other things, on people having arguments at a precise time of the night, a butler only looking at a room from one position and a man, rushing for a train, remembering to telephone his doctor. The fact that any argument should begin at 9.45pm and last fifteen minutes is not outwith the bounds of possibility, of course, but Christie does have things fit together somewhat implausibly rather often in her work. While

the reader is often left with the impression that the novel has been written backwards – that is, with the story at the service of the conclusion – this is not to say that this is an insurmountable weakness in her work. Rather, the fact that Christie as the queen bee of the Golden Age uses implausible, unrealistic scenarios in her work is simply indicative of the fact that the Golden Age writers were not particularly interested in plausibility or realism.¹³¹ Indeed, Christie seems to enjoy settling the puzzles in a “traditional style”: as Knight suggests, “she had obviously read Doyle, from whom comes the initial model of detective and narrator” (Knight 82). He also warns us to beware wishing that the novels be more engaged with the real world: “the key to the long-lasting and genre-shaping power of Christie is her capacity to realise in formulaic, repeatable mode a sense of personal unease and possible danger that emerges in – especially in – a world secluded from social and international disorder” (ibid 92).

¹³¹ I do wish to point out that there is some reference in Christie and Sayers to the reality of the political and social changes in the early 20th Century. Note, for example, Sayers’ interest in the social plights of the female characters in *Unnatural Death*, wherein the murderess is driven to her original crime by new legislation that subtly changes the dynamic in society, and one of the investigators is an elderly lady who relishes the chance to escape from the role that the culture has written for her. Also of note are Marple’s periodic complaints about the changing face of Britain, always subtly ironized by the author.

This lack of interest in the realistic portrayal of crime leads us also to consider the first and second points stated above. With the detective resembling Holmes more than Martin Beck (see below), the scenarios time-shifted backwards, and no obligation to represent reality, how does the scientific world-view impact on the Golden Age of detective fiction?

The truth is that it rarely makes an appearance. Certainly, the chemistry of poisons and the biology of the body are of crucial importance, here more than at any other point in the history of detective fiction. But there is no sign of the scientific revolution going on around. The detectives are gentlemen, peers of the realm. They are bastions, in some senses, of the Old Order, and the crimes that they visit are in that orbit. We are talking about the British upper and upper-middle classes, and when science is mentioned outside arsenic, cyanide and autopsy, it is in terms of breakthrough technology for the war effort. It is here that Gadda differs from the Golden Age authors, and not in his morality. In fact, according to Pietropaoli – a critic willing to take Gadda on as a writer of mysteries – Gadda's cosmology is 'direttamente morale' There is a 'responsibilità morale collettiva' (Pietropaoli 71) in his conception of crime.

Gadda refuses instead to disregard the scientific and philosophical changes that surrounded him.

It is only possible to ignore the developments of science by shifting time or - and this is crucial to understanding Gadda's "failure" by the rules of the genre as understood by the Golden Age - by imposing a limit on variables.

So often in Christie, the crime takes place in a location that only a certain number of people have access to. *The Hollow*, *Five Little Pigs* and *Peril at End House* are just three of the novels that feature large country houses with members of the same family and friends the only possible suspects. *Death on the Nile*, *Evil Under the Sun*, *Murder in Mesopotamia* and *Murder in the Calais Coach* all have characters who are unrelated, or seem to be unrelated, but are thrown together by their being in a foreign country, or travelling together. In nearly every mystery story of this period there is a more-or-less artificial attempt to have the characters enclosed and limited in some way.¹³² This shows a realisation of the part of the writers that the narrative of the detective story

¹³² An exception is the aforementioned *Unnatural Death* which makes a great show of the uncertainty of the whereabouts of certain characters and features London, Liverpool and Canada as well as the traditional country house. But this novel is exceptional also in the fact that it is less a whodunit? as it is a whydunit? and howdunit?, as the identity of the murderer is more or less certain from the start.

begins to break down at a certain point of complexity, and that the straightforward, logical approach of the scientist-detective only works when there are an appropriate number of variables. Too many and we find uncertainty, chaos, randomness. This is the result of the changes in the way that the culture that these books appear in sees itself. After Einstein, Planck and Heisenberg, it is difficult for anyone to be really certain that the logical, scientific process is the only one to live by. It is still harder when we take into account science's role in the history of the first half of the twentieth century to trust it. Perhaps that is the reason for the shifts in the writing of the detective story that occur about this time.

3: 3 Sam Spade (and Flitcraft)

The first shift that we see in the detective novel comes from Dashiell Hammett, the former Pinkerton operative. His characters inhabit a world of darkness, of subterfuge, the kind of *noir* that we associate with the America of the 1920s and 1930s. His 1930 novel *The Maltese Falcon* is the best known of his works. Unlike most of his other tales, novels like *The Glass Key*, *The Dain Curse* or short stories like "The Girl With the Silver Eyes", Hammett does not use a first person narrative in this novel: the private detective is a man called Sam Spade, who is

sparsely described, and always in terms of contrasts. We are told that he looks “rather pleasantly like a blond Satan” (Hammett 1).¹³³ His face is “peaceful” (ibid 38) just before he commits acts of violence. Spade is a confusing character for those of us who are used to the kind of detective that Holmes – or Poirot – is. It is not entirely clear, for instance, whether he is a good guy or a bad guy at the end of the novel. “We are never quite sure which side of the line Sam Spade is going to come down on. He acts like an outlaw, he acts like he could be a criminal – the cops treat him that way, the criminals treat him that way – yet somehow he comes out on the side of law.” (Slotkin 99).

I will return to that kind of confusion in a moment or two. This novel is Hammett’s best known not because it is (in my opinion) his best – *The Glass Key* deserves that title – but because of the wonderful 1941 film adaptation by John Huston, starring Humphrey Bogart and Mary Astor. This adaptation of the novel is remarkably faithful, with many lines directly taken from the book. The legend is that Huston told his secretary to retype the novel and have it rebound

¹³³ The reader of *Quer pasticciaccio* thinks of Francesco Ingravalle “onnipresente nei affari tenebroso” and his devilish overtones.

as a screenplay.¹³⁴ One episode that is missing from the film is a story that serves as a blueprint for Hammett's project as a writer of detective fiction.

The Flitcraft story – about a man who decides one day that he needs to change his way of life because of a near-death experience, leaves his wife and children to live “at random” (ibid. 61), but ends up living a very similar existence to the one he left – is told to Brigid O'Shaughnessy while they wait for Joe Cairo. What interests me is the way that the story is told: there is no introduction, no guide to the correct interpretation. It is almost as if Hammett is making the act of writing of a mystery novel explicit to us.

Spade sat down in the armchair beside the table and without any preliminary, without an introductory remark of any sort, began to tell the girl about a thing that had happened some years ago in the Northwest. He talked in a steady matter-of-fact voice that was devoid of emphasis or pauses, though now and again he repeated a sentence slightly rearranged, as if it were important that each detail be related exactly as it happened...
(Hammett 2002 56)

That is almost exactly what Hammett has done with us. His sparse style – there is no moral guide, no narrative voice warning us that someone is “sinister” or “evil” – means that he tells the tale of the Falcon in the same way that Spade

¹³⁴ The Sun Sentinel published an article on its webpages in March 2008 on the few changes made in the film from the novel. The Fort Lauderdale-based newspaper notes that the famous last line “The stuff that dreams are made of” is an improvisation by Bogart.

tells his tale. We are shown events, details, but offered no commentary, no interpretation. He is showing us the surfaces of things: we must decide on what lies beneath. Whatever Spade's motivations as a character for telling this tale, he must surely be left disappointed by Brigid's reaction. "'How perfectly fascinating', Brigid O'Shaughnessy said. She left her chair and stood in front of him, close. Her eyes were wide and deep." (ibid. 62)

The "living at random" idea sums up Spade's philosophy of being a detective neatly. He says later that his idea of investigating is to "throw a monkey wrench into the machine" and see what happens. Brigid's inability to see this is what leads to her – far from capturing Spade's heart – on the way to prison at the close of the novel. Spade is not predictable because the world he operates in is not predicable. There are too many voices, too many possibilities. The world is like a machine that explodes when a monkey wrench is thrown into it, and the detective's job is to put the bits and pieces, cogs and flywheels, wires and valves, back into some kind of recognisable order.

At about the half-way point of the novel, a strange thing happens to the story: it finds an object on which to centre, a focal point. Perhaps it is further

emblematic of the confusion inherent in the twentieth century world that the novel inhabits. In any case, Hammett breaks one of the unwritten rules of the genre by shifting our attention away from the murders at the beginning of the book, and towards the search for the Maltese Falcon. This object causes confusion in itself, because it is so many things: a gift from The Knights Templar to Charles V of Spain;¹³⁵ the booty of pirates; an ornament for a Russian colonel's mantelpiece; the stock of a Greek antiques dealer; and finally, a fake.

Gutman's breath hissed between his teeth. His face became turgid with hot blood. He twisted the bird around and hacked at its head. There too the edge of his knife bared lead. He let knife and bird bang down on the table where he wheeled to confront Spade. "It's a fake," he said hoarsely.
(ibid 198)

The undefined nature of the Falcon, the fact that Spade largely ignores the murder of Archer, the "living at random" and the undemonstrative style of the writing all contribute to a feeling of confusion, a lack of resolution in the novel. The centre, the focal point is an illusion, a projection of the desires of the character. This is the dark side of American Capitalism: once money enters the equation, morals and ethics can be bought, and rules are out the window. The world is one in which there is great uncertainty.

¹³⁵ But this is impossible. The Knights Templar were disbanded in 1312, while Charles V's reign was between 1516 and 1556. Hammett is perhaps thinking of the Knights Hospitaller, or it could be that, as Dan Brown might say, "the discrepancy is intentional."

Hammett manages to resolve the tale, after a fashion, by keeping close to his villains. They sort the thing out by killing each other over double-crosses, and Spade sends Brigid off to prison when she confesses that she killed Archer. It is Spade's proximity to the gang that makes it possible: it is easy for someone like him to win a fist-fight. But what happens when the detective is at more of a distance? When he is a police officer, perhaps, constrained to operate within a bureaucracy?

3: 4 Francesco Ingravallo – an introduction

Gadda is not quite as well known as Arthur Conan Doyle, or for that matter, Hammett, but we must remember that he explicitly expressed a wish to write something “conandoyliano”¹³⁶ for the mass market. *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* is a long way from anything that Holmes would appear in. It is a kind of mystery story, of course, with a robbery, a dead woman, and an investigation. But there is something critically lacking: a solution.

¹³⁶ *Dejanira Classis*, RR II 1317-318

The detective in this case, a certain Francesco Ingravallo, is also a kind of intellectual, one who reads “strange books” and philosophises on the job:

Sosteneva, fra l'altro, che le inopinate catastrofi non sono mai conseguenza o l'effetto che dir si voglia d'un unico motivo, d'una causa al singolare: ma sono come un vortice, un punto di depressione ciclonica nella coscienza del mondo, verso cui hanno cospirato tutta una molteplicità di causali convergenti.
(QP RR II 16)

He sustained, amongst other things, that unforeseen catastrophes are never the consequence, or the effect, if you prefer, of a single motive, of *a* cause singular; but they are rather like a whirlpool, a cyclonic depression in the consciousness of the world, towards which a whole multitude of converging causes have contributed.
(AM 5)

It is this that eventually causes the dramatic evaporation of a solution in the final words of the novel: the constant adding of new faces, new stories, the increase of the multitude. Even if all the information is present, the problem is in sorting, understanding, decoding the attempts to communicate. And the information does come to Ingravallo. He is a good policeman, after all, and the difficulties he faces are not caused by his inability to garner knowledge. His instincts are good, too.

Don Ciccio sudò freddo. Tutta la storia, teoreticamente, gli puzzava di favola. Ma la voce del giovane, quegli accenti, quel gesto, erano la voce della verità.
(QP RR II 119)

Don Ciccio was in a cold sweat. The whole story, theoretically, smelled like a fairy tale to him. But the young man's voice, his accents, those gestures, were the voice of truth.
(AM 159)

So, even once Ingravallo knows more or less what is true, his job is not even half finished. The sheer weight of evidence, the number of plausible motives, the half-dozen suspects in the end lead only to stagnation and "cold sweat". Everything from the buttonhole of his superior to the dying father of the accused Assunta is a further confusion, a further *pasticciaccio* that needs to be sorted out before the truth will be made clear. And his own humanity, his own emotions and feelings are what gets in the way.

Insofferente 'e chillo novo imbruoglio del genitore moribondo e tuttavia peritosa e pietosa, la immaginativa del dottor Ingravallo scaliò, sgroppò, galoppò, udì e vide: vedeva e già già liquidava la bara senza drappo, d'assi pioppo [.]
(QP RR II 273)

Intolerant of this new mess of the dying patient and yet cautious and pitying, the imagination of Doctor Ingravallo kicked, bucked, galloped, heard and saw: he was seeing and already dismissing the coffin without drapery, of poplar planks [.]
(AM 384)

There are two problems here, one of scale and one of personality. Certainly, the sheer amount of information that is generated by the investigation is like nothing that we find at any point in the Holmesian canon. But Ingravallo is

unable to personally take the step that Holmes realises is essential – he cannot detach himself from the crime he is investigating, the murder of a woman that he may well have even been in love with. Nor can he empty his internal room of all the clutter that is unnecessary. Gadda makes this abundantly clear to us not just by increasing the amount that the police learn but by forcing the reader into the same predicament by piling detail upon detail and digression upon digression, so that we no longer feel steady in our own interpretation of just what is supposed to be happening here.

Il memento tecnico del Bertarelli, del Vitòri, del Lüis, a quegli anni: poi, su riscialbate muriccia ad ogni entrar di borgo, il politico-totalitario del Merda: (“è l’aratro che scava il solco! ma è la spada ... che non lo difende un fico secco.”) Il maresciallo Santarella cavalier Fabrizio era, era un “entusiasta” del Touring, di cui, come “socio vitalizio”, aveva a memoria l’inno: “l’inno del Touring” nato in Valtellina alla musa ipocarducciano-iposaffica di Giovanni Bertacchi: nobilmente cesurato inno, come la Marsigliese e come ogni inno in genere, dall’impeto ardimentoso del refrain: di quel ritornello così caro a tutti i cuori de’ soci vitalizi motociclisti:

Avanti, avanti, via!

Che esclude, come si vede, ogni possibilità di marcia indietro.

(QP RR II 159)

The technical memento of Bertarelli, of Vitori, of Luis, in those years: then, on reblanched walls at the entrance to every hamlet, the totalitario-political signs of the Turd: (“it is the plow that makes the furrow, but it is the sword that defends it . . . in a pig’s ass”). Sergeant Santarella, Cavaliere Fabrizio, was, was a “great enthusiast” of the Touring Club; as a “life member” he knew its anthem by heart: “The Touring Hymn,” born in Valtellina to the hypocarduccian-hyposapphic Muse of Giovanni Bertacchi: a nobly caesuraed hymn,

like the Marseillaise, and like all anthems in general, with a bold impetuosity in the refrain, that *ritornello* so dear to the hearts of all the life-member motorcyclists:

Forward! And on we go!

Which eliminates, as one can see, any possibility of going into reverse.

(AM 217)

The references to Vittorio Luigi Bertarelli and the Touring Club are obscure enough in this passage to give some idea of the difficulties in just staying on top of the plot: at this point the Carabinieri are about to question a number of suspects and uncover the stolen valuables.

The detectives never seem to be quite on top of the case, so differently from Holmes. They are bullying and blustering in their questioning, always trying to trick information out of the suspects and witnesses, never fully in control.

“La signora Liliana, potete dire! ch   stata sgozzata da un assassino!”
du occhi, fece, che la Tina impaur  , questa volta: “da un assassino,”
ripet  , del “qua-le,” favell   curule, “aggio saputo il nome, il
cognome!... e dove sta: e cosa fa...” La ragazza sbianc  , non disse a.

“Fuori il nome!” url   don Ciccio. “La polizzia lo conosce gi   chesto
nome. Se lo dite subito,” la voce divenne grave, suasiva: “   tanto di
guadagnato anche pe vvoi.”

“Sor dott  ,” ripet   la Tina a prender tempo, esitante, “come j’ ‘o
posso d   che nun so gnente?”

“Anche troppo lo sai, bugiarda,” url   Ingravallo di nuovo, grugno a
grugno [...] “Sputa ‘o nome, chillo ca tieni c  : o t’ ‘o far   sputare ‘o
brigadiere, in caserma, a Marino[.]

(QP RR II 276)

"Signora Liliana, you mean! who had her throat cut by a murderer!" and his eyes were such that, this time, Tina was frightened: "by a murderer," he repeated, "whose name," he spoke, curule, "whose full name we know!... and where he lives: and what he does..."

The girl turned white, but didn't say a word.

"Out with his name!" yelled Don Ciccio. "The police know this name already. If you tell it right now," his voice became deep, persuasive: "it's all to the good, for you."

"Doctor Ingravalli," repeated Tina to gain time, hesitating, "how can I say it, when I don't know anything?"

"You know too much, you liar," shouted Ingravallo again, his nose to hers [...] "Cough it up, that name: or the corporal'll make you spill it, in the barracks, at Marino[.]"

(AM 387)

This episode occurs just moments before the famous final scene in which we are not introduced to the murderer, the mask is not pulled away and no-one would have got away for it, pesky kids or no. This moment marks a crisis, not just in the novel but in the world in which the novel is to operate. The surfeit of details, of digressions, of possible connections prevents the novel from reaching any kind of a solution that will satisfy the reader. The author, aware of this abdicates his responsibility to provide us with that satisfaction that is at the heart of the genre. The ending – while dramatically effective – leaves one rather cold.

And well it might, because the ending recognises the ultimate failure of instrumental rationality. The confidence that reasoning like automata gave us is paid for by the loss of our humanity. One cannot be both a sympathetic man like Ingravallo and have the powers of a Sherlock Holmes. At the same time, we realise that there is a limit to our processing capacity, and that the whole world and everything in it is too much for us to conjure with. Ingravallo may well be right when he thinks that any event is the result of a whole multitude of converging causes, but we have no space – in life or in literature – to work them all out.

We will have far more to say on the topic of *Quer pasticciaccio* and its famous detective later in the piece. It is time now to briefly discuss the aftermath of Gadda's experiment in detective fiction. I wish to make it clear that I do not consider Gadda to have been the father of detective fiction in the second half of the twentieth century: instead I consider his example a demonstration of the implausibility of the genre as it found itself. Because Gadda's story is so nearly a police procedural, I invite us now to look at perhaps the finest series of police procedurals: the Swedish Martin Beck series.

3: 5 Martin Beck

In the Martin Beck series of mysteries, a solution is proposed to the puzzle that Gadda sets us in his *Awful Mess*. Sjöwall and Wahlöö, “avowedly Marxist” (Knight 195) authors compose real mystery stories, cutting close to the stream of “Golden Age” fiction that still runs through our landscape. But their man is neither infallible nor especially intellectual.

Martin Beck’s closest analogue is perhaps Maigret, or even Poirot. He is interested in the web of human relationships, rather than analysing the crime as a dispassionate scientist. Like Ingravallo, however, he is surrounded by more or less competent assistants, colleagues and superiors who often take up large parts of the narrative to themselves.

These minor characters help to pile on the complexity of the cases that are recounted in the novels. By the constant addition of detail, new suspects, new evidence the reader – and to some extent, Beck himself – is confused, put off the scent. But it is in the accumulation of these data that the solution emerges, as if by chance. Co-incidence is the secret to Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s brand of mystery

writing. I offer a few examples, some of them rather trivial, from *The Laughing Policeman*.

“On the morning of 10 June 1951, that’s to say more than sixteen years ago, a man who was looking for his cat found a dead woman near some bushes near Stadshagen sports ground on Kungsholem here in town.”
(Sjöwall and Wahlöö 185)

“What do you want to tell me?” Kollberg said gruffly.
Birgersson smiled.
“It seems silly,” he said. “But I remembered something this evening. You were talking about the car, my Morris. And...”
“Yes? And?”
“Once when Inspector Stenström and I had a break and sat having something to eat, I told him a story. I remembered we had boiled pickled pork and mashed turnips. It’s my favourite dish and today when we had Christmas dishes...”
Kollberg regarded the man with massive disapproval. [...]
“Yes, yes, I see.” He said impatiently. “What did you do?”
“I used to look at cars.”
“Cars?” [...]
“I could recognise all cars forty or fifty yards away, from whichever side I saw them. If I could have taken part in one of those quiz programmes on TV, you know when they ask you some questions on one special subject, I’d have won first prize...”
(ibid 214-6)

Of course, this accumulation of seemingly useless witnesses, fragments of gossip and accidental discoveries is part of the work of any fictional police force. What is particularly interesting about the way that Sjöwall and Wahlöö work is

the way in which these coincidence are dealt with. There is no human genius behind the solution, just blind luck.

Let's take the longer quote above. It comes from late on in the novel, after a good many people have been interviewed about a mass shooting on a bus in Stockholm. There are a number of leads that are being followed, and this seemingly irrelevant discussion is being held with a man who was part of an investigation by a young detective, Stenström. Stenström was investigating the disappearance of a young woman, the one discovered in the bushes, before he was one of the victims in the bus shooting. In the course of this story it is only now that the information that Kollberg is about to receive will make any sense – the timing (nine thirty in the evening of the 24th of December) is crucial. And unbelievably lucky.

In Sjöwall and Wahlöö's novels, fortune shines on Martin Beck and his team because it is the only way that the detection narrative can be brought to a successful conclusion. It is one possible solution to the problem that Gadda makes clear. And their solution is by no means unsatisfying. In fact, their work is regarded very highly by their peers, critics and mass audiences. My copy of

the novel reminds me in the first line of the Introduction that "*The Laughing Policeman* is the only Swedish novel ever to have been made into a Hollywood movie." (Sjöwall and Wahlöö v)

One wonders if the avowed Marxism of the authors has somehow brought them closer to the Victorian Conan Doyle, with his belief in the powers of science, national character and the power of justice. Perhaps it is this very philosophical and political belief system that allows the system, the procedure that they write to lead somewhere rather than no-where. Is the answer a kind of Marx of the Gaps, a belief that history is moving, going somewhere, and that it will all work out in the end?

3: 6 Mrs Oedipa Maas

We come last, in this brief summary of the genre, to the novel *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon. This novel can be characterised as postmodern, and as such it throws up a new set of problems for the reader and the student of detective fiction.

The quotations from other texts are plentiful and variously subtle. The detective is Oedipa Mass, a name taken from the most famous of the early detectives, the riddle solver Oedipus. The dead man in the novel spoke in a "Lamont Cranston" voice. There are fictional texts, the variants in which are spoken aloud, then disappear, are found in the Vatican Library and then give a crucial clue to the mystery at the centre of the novel and perhaps cause an actor/director to commit suicide.

We are not dealing with any old detective novel here, but one that sits atop a whole tradition of crime writing. The reader does not come to this book uncorrupted, but used to the manners and style of the genre. And from the very beginning we are put on our guard. Characters behave like actors. Some of the characters are actors, like Metzger, a lawyer who was a child actor and his friend Manny di Presso, a former lawyer become an actor who plays Metzger, a child actor become a lawyer, in a miniseries. Other characters put on voices: "'Why do you sing in English accents, when you don't talk that way?' asked Oedipa." The question is addressed to Miles, the lead singer of the Paranoids. "'Hey blokes,' yelled Dean or perhaps Serge, 'let's pinch a boat.' 'Hear, hear,' cried the girls." (Pynchon 37) "'Your young man,' replied Miles, 'Metzger,

really put it to Serge, our counter-tenor. The lad is crackers with grief.' 'He's right, missus,' said Serge, 'I even wrote a song about it, whose arrangement features none other than me, and it goes like this.'" (ibid 101). While in itself this may be disconcerting for those happiest in the armchair before the fire at 221B Baker Street, what is far more worrying is the paucity of information that Oedipa has to go on. In fact, one cannot be sure at all that there is any mystery for her to investigate. The only dead body in the tale is that of Pierce Inverarity, a tycoon and former boyfriend of Oedipa Maas. His will, and the task of executing it, leads Oedipa to discover, amongst other things: a secret postal system called W.A.S.T.E. and its history of subversion and blood; an exception to the 2nd Law of thermodynamics; an artificial lake for scuba divers with skeletons imported from Italy; a little-known Jacobean play called *The Courier's Tragedy*. Had this been a simple mystery story in the vein of those we are used to, we should expect things to become clearer as these varied pieces approach each other. The fact that things get less clear is not now just a question of finding a solution difficult, but a fundamental doubt over whether or not there is a problem.

"But there's another angle too... Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody's putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died?"

It had occurred to her, but like the thought that someday she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly.
(ibid 130)

At the end of the novel, Oedipa finds herself exposed, isolated from the various people who had tried to help her. She is in a horrible position as the last line is written, waiting as the auctioneer clears his throat, to hear whether she has been fooled, whether she has discovered a secret America, or whether she is simply insane. She even hopes that it is this last.

Finally she feels herself lonely in the crowd of people in the auction room, staring not at faces, but at the napes of necks. It is this isolation from others, her failure to communicate with them, their unavailability, that has brought her to this point. Oedipa is alone because of her rejection of the insincere, the false connections that make up Southern California, the highways that lead to no particular place. In her decision to opt out of the modern America – read “modern World” – she has lost, subtly, her grip on reality and the right to interact. Hence there is no solution, and the question of whether there ever was a problem is unanswerable.

As we move from the relatively simple world that Holmes inhabited to the zany cartoon that is Southern California as seen by Oedipa Maas, we see the changes that have affected the culture that produces these artefacts. It shows us how this culture has shifted from a kind of “faith in science” towards no faith at all, not even the expectation that there should be a question to address to ourselves. As Marcus says, Pynchon’s *Lot 49* “hesitates between models of excess and exhaustion, of meaning too much or too little” (Marcus 261). If Gadda leaves us with the chaos of instrumental rationality, Pynchon opens up to us the terror of the individual’s isolation before the cosmos. This puts the reader in a difficult situation. As Winks says, discussing the postmodern detective novel: “living with ambiguity is not easy. Most people like their history clear and plain: they want to know the ten causes for the fall of the Roman Empire, the reasons why the middle class is always rising, and why Jack Ruby was shot, and they are convinced that there are answers that are being kept from them” (Winks 8)

This is not the only tale in the history of the genre, nor is this the only genre we could mine. This is not the only important culture that we have to look at. But when we have taken stock of these changes in this moment of human life, we have learned something of our place in the universe.

4: Gadda's Characters

Far from conforming to the previous norms of detective fiction, Gadda instead is the first of a new breed, taking on the world of the investigator and finding it lacking in terms of hard facts and straight answers.¹³⁷ This is overall an indication of Gadda's view of the world: that our knowledge about it is at best an approximation, that science can take us only so far, that any attempt to examine our own lives or the lives of other people must take account of a basic fuzziness in the picture. Where this is particularly relevant is in the question of how Gadda presents his own characters, how they deal with the world they are in, and what affects them. In this chapter, I will examine again Ingravallo and the jeweller, Ceccherelli, from *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, before visiting Gonzalo Pirobutirro from *Cognizione del dolore*. This last is particularly interesting as here we have the potential to make clear some of the contradictions inherent in Gadda's view of the world through examination of a partly autobiographical figure. It is in Gonzalo, as we will see, that the man of science meets the logician, the determinist meets the complex world, the positivist meets the quanta.

¹³⁷ As an example for the popular acceptance of Gadda's position as the first of the writers of *Italian Noir*, see Francis Welch, "Italian Noir," *Timeshift* (United Kingdom: BBC, 2010).

4: 1 More About Ingravallo: The Gaddian Detective

Let us move closer to the best known of all Gadda's characters:¹³⁸ Don Ciccio Ingravallo. Ingravallo, our version, as I have tried to show above, of Sherlock Holmes, is straight away the subject of suspicion for his tendency towards a scientific bent of mind. This, of course, may have been suggested to Gadda by his attempt to "Conan Doyle up" his mystery novel, but Ingravallo is a very different kind of scientist from Holmes.

Holmes still belongs in an earlier period. His science is the science of the late Victorian, positivistic era: the act of chemistry, the practice of biology, the application of physics gives certainty of results. Results that can be applied with no apparent difficulty to the matrix of human interaction. Deduction and a modicum of drama, a moment of uncertainty (thank you, Dr Watson) to keep us reading. It is almost a shame that Gadda cannot put Ingravallo back to the late 1800s: he would have been able to muse from the comfort of his office and smoke fully his "*mezza sigaretta*" while the details of the crime played out in his head. It is in Gadda's refusal to do this, the decision to make him a modern man, living after the age of positivism, indeed in the age of Fascism, that make

¹³⁸ Well known enough, in fact, to be parodied in literature. Cfr Lucarelli's *Via delle Oche* (1996) where Ingravallo is depicted waiting to be questioned about his work in the Mussolini era in the course of de-fascistification.

him such a compelling addition to the canon. We may imagine Holmes' or even Poirot's reaction to the news of the murder of Liliana: Holmes, impassionate, his face hardening slightly, may have betrayed a moment's grief before recollecting himself and informing Watson that he knew that that might have happened. Poirot would have let out a "*Mon Dieu!*" in a moment of passion. Ingravallo, a man of the 20th century, of the real 20th century cannot act like that: the science of his world is dizzying in its complexity, a world lost in detail. The murder of Liliana cleaves him to the core. It opens him up, and we see his heart beating. The crimes, despite his philosophizing and his "strange books", disturb him and expose his humanity in a way we could never conceive happening to Holmes.

What makes us place Ingravallo in the category of a "scientist"? So many of the critics that read *Quer pasticciaccio* point out the significance and the beauty, in fact, of those first pages of the novel, those that Pedriali calls the *incipit*. It is here that we are saddled with Ingravallo as our investigator, and we are not going to be rid of him despite his failures and despite the appearance of Pestalozzi later on. It is in this short section that we get to know him, even to – and this is the strongest praise one can give Gadda – fall in love with him

through those tiny little details that we are given, as if seen by a lover, capped off by that “mezza sigaretta, regolarmente spenta” (QP RR II 17) [half cigarette that had, always, gone out. (AM 7)]

It is in this section that we find out that Don Ciccio is treated with some suspicion, because of his philosophizing, and the charge that he read “strange books”:

Qualche collega un tantino invidioso delle sue trovate, qualche prete più edotto dei molti danni del secolo, alcuni subalterni, certi uscieri, i superiori, sostenevano che leggesse dei libri strani: da cui cavava tutte quelle parole che non vogliono dir nulla, o quasi nulla, ma servono come non altre ad accileccare gli sprovveduti, gli ignari. (QP RR II 17)

Some colleagues, a tiny bit envious of his intuitions, a few priests, more acquainted with the many evils of our time, some subalterns, clerks, and his superiors too, insisted he read strange books: from which he drew all those words that meant nothing, or almost nothing, but which serve better than others to dazzle the naïve, the innocent. (AM 6)

What kind of strange books? It is clear that they are not religious strange books: these are the suspect works of scientists and philosophers of science. Stuff of the modern world. What of his famous philosophy?

Sosteneva, fra l'altro, che le inopinate catastrofi non sono mai la conseguenza o l'effetto che dir si voglia d'un unico motivo, d'una causa al singolare: ma sono come un vortice, un punto di depressione

ciclonica nella coscienza del mondo, verso cui hanno cospirato tutta una molteplicità di causali convergenti.
(QP RR II 16)

He sustained, amongst other things, that unforeseen catastrophes are never the consequence, or the effect, if you prefer, of a single motive, of a cause singular; but they are rather like a whirlpool, a cyclonic depression in the consciousness of the world, towards which a whole multitude of converging causes have contributed.
(AM 5)

This is certainly the philosophy of strange books, and it sits a long way from either the tradition of the priests (an eschatological certainty of the world's beginning and end) and the certainties of science. The envy of his critics is interesting: perhaps Gadda has added these dissenting voices to make his point, as Ingravallo's ideas would have been ahead of their time in 1927, especially in an Italian police station. To be specific, this sounds like an early form of chaos theory, or perhaps an extension of the theory of particles: with uncertainty a central feature. This is not the thought process of the 1890s: there is not much trace of a positivist, deterministic mindset.

This is how immediately, right in the first few pages of the novel, Gadda juxtaposes a certain, scientific, analytical, instrumentally rational way of looking at the world with the deflationary pressure of real life. This is just the first

example of a subtle undermining of the scientific mindset that Gadda will indulge in through his characterisation. Soon afterwards, we see the way that Ingravallo thinks when he is called upon to repress certain thoughts that arise under the influence of the golden wine from Frascati. It is interesting and instructive that he leans on a conception of the world that is even older than the Victorian, positivistic view that we have been discussing. Ingravallo is positively pre-Newtonian at this moment of intellectual confusion and approaching drunkenness.

E al centro quegli occhi dell'Assunta: quell'alterigia: come fosse una sua degnazione servirli a tavola. Al centro ... di tutto il sistema ... tolemaico: già tolemaico. Al centro, parlanno co rispetto, quer po' po' de signorino.
(QP RR II 20)

In the center those eyes of Assunta's, that pride: as if she were denigrated by serving them at table. In the center ... of the whole ... Ptolemaic system; yes, Ptolemaic. In the center, meaning no offense, that terrific behind.
(AM 11)

This is the first sign (and it comes early on) of what will prove to be Ingravallo's problem. There is to be no mistake over the Ptolemaic worldview and Ingravallo's slightly inebriated mind's desire to cling to it. This short moment is a warning to us that Ingravallo's preference under pressure is to fall back on a conception of the world that no longer has any currency today.

4:2 The Background Voices

A fascinating way in which Gadda chooses to undermine the positivistic drive towards instrumental rationality is by exposing the form that this takes in the minds of the common people in the background of the novels. I am talking here about characters such as the peasants in *CdD* or the Romans and the folk from the countryside in *QP*, who have such an important role to play in the mechanics of Gadda's art. While such characters as these often appear to be disparaged in the text, the reality is that these play an essential role in developing the polyvocality and depth of the text. These are, in fact, Gadda's main vehicles for humour and wisdom.

Take, for example, Virginia's belief that Professor Ghianda is Don Corpi's foot doctor ("piediatrician") instead of a paediatrician (AM 184). This injection of humour at the same time satirises both the simplicity of Virginia's background and, crucially, the education and learning of the Dr himself. It is this sort of detail that makes Gadda more than just a raging misanthrope: in his mockery of the uneducated, the truth about the overblown pretensions and airs that people give themselves – Gadda included – is exposed. Unsurprisingly, it is often in

the area of scientific knowledge that Gadda works on this supposed common ignorance. Unsurprisingly: because in this very field we have more half-learned truth, half-understood myths and half-spelled pronunciations than in almost any other in human culture. Perhaps we may even place the example of Professor Ghianda in this category. By using this sort of joke, Gadda is not only mocking the people, but the ideas: we are witnessing a breakdown of instrumental rationality before the excesses of humour.

In the report of the interview with Ceccherelli, the jeweller, we have a glimpse of the kind of breakdown of scientific knowledge that we might have expected from this opposition between the educated and uneducated. Here, however, the polyvocality is, ironically, situated in the one throat.

Che però io, poi, sa, con rispetto parlanno, sì che me ne buggero de tutte ste superstizione de la gente: che pare d'esse in der medioevo, quasi quasi! Io, in coscienza, tiro a fa l'affari mia: più puliti che posso. In quarant'anni che ciò er negozio, me creda, dottò, nun ho avuto a dì p'una spilla! E poi, a bon conto, l'ho subito schiaffato in der cassetto ch' 'o tengo apposta pe questo, subito subito appena l'ho cavato fora dar castone suo, a forza de pinze, senza manco toccallo co le dita, se po dì: le pinze, ho fatto un sarto dar barbiere de faccia pe disinfettalle coll'alcole: e lui, er sor coso, l'ho schiaffato in der cassetto quello là in fonno isolato p'annà ar cesso [...] che ce stanno insieme tanti de quei corni de corallo che gnente gnente je pijasse la fantasia de volemme jetta la bottega ... a me, jettamme? Sì, stai fino, vorebbe vede, povero fijo! È come un cappone in mezzo a tanti galli!

(QP RR II 122)

I don't give a good goddamn about these old superstitions. Why, you'd think you were in the Middle Ages, indeed you would. Now, in all conscience, I'm interested in doing business, in as straightforward a way as possible. In the forty years I've had my shop, believe me, Doctor, there has never been so much as a word, not a shadow of a doubt, even for so much as a pin. And besides, just to be on the safe side, as soon as I took [the 'cursed' opal from Liliana's present to Valdarena] out of its setting, with pincers, not even touching it with my fingers, so to speak. As for the pincers, I stepped next door to the barber's and disinfected them with alcohol: and as for the gem in question then, I locked it away in that drawer, the last one on the way to the bathroom [...] it's so packed with coral horns that if that opal decided to put the evil eye on the shop ... on my shop? Poor opal. It's like a capon in there, in the midst of so many roosters!

(AM 162)

Apart from being a brilliant little example of the kind of humour that Gadda specialises in, this piece demonstrates some little themes that are of importance for our enquiry. Firstly, there is the same distinction that I have hinted at above: the old "superstitious" world of the "Middle Ages" compared with the present. Next comes an example of the instrumental way of reckoning: the shop, the career of the jeweller, is measured in financial safety, his worth is reduced to the fact there is no "doubt", no chance of miscounting, of things going missing. Thirdly, and most entertainingly, there is the little detail of the scissors, bringing the Middle Ages and Germ Theory together to prove the point that increased

scientific knowledge does not necessarily lead to freedom from superstition and ignorance before the mysteries of life.

4: 3 The Scientific Detective 2: The Limits of Reason

Later on in the novel, where we are let into the mind of Don Ciccio, we can hear the whirring of his cognitive machinery. He is human, of course, and he has his doubts, but his attempts to come to terms with the world are usually couched in terms of rationality, especially the rationality of the sciences. However, in moments of stress, of extreme pressure, Ingravallo's mind seems to surrender before the strain of rationalisation and his imagination takes over. I have already noted in passing his thoughts at the sight of Liliana's body, but the same things happen to him in his interview with Valdarena:

Don Ciccio sudò freddo. Tutta la storia, teoricamente, gli puzzava di favola. Ma la voce del giovane, quegli accenti, quel gesto, erano la voce della verità. Il mondo delle cosiddette verità, filosofò, non è che un contesto di favole: di brutti sogni. Talchè soltanto la fumea dei sogni e delle favole può aver nome verità. [...] Col suo sdentato ghigno, e con quel suo fiato da pozza nero che lo distingue, il senso comune si sbeffava già del racconto, voleva ridergli una maialata sulla faccia, a don Ciccio [...] Ma non si può impedire il pensiero: arriva prima lui. Non si può scancellare dalla notte il baleno d'un'idea.
(QP RR II 119)

Don Ciccio was in a cold sweat. The whole story, theoretically, smelled like a fairy tale to him. But the young man's voice, his accents, those gestures, were the voice of truth. The world of verities, he philosophized, is merely a tissue of fairy tales: and bad dreams. So that only the mist of dreams and fairy tales can have the name of truth. ... With his toothless grin, with that latrine-like breath that distinguishes him, Common Sense was already mocking the story, wanting to laugh, swine-like, in Don Ciccio's face ... But Thought will not be prevented: he arrives first. You can't erase from the night the flash of an idea.

(AM 159)

and at the climax of the novel, as he stands in the presence of Assuntina's dying father:

Insofferente 'e chillo novo imbruoglio del genitore moribondo e tuttavia peritosa e pietosa, la immaginativa del dottor Ingravallo scalciò, sgroppò, galoppò, udì e vide: vedeva e già già liquidava la bara senza drappo, d'assi pioppo [...] Don Ciccio moderò il galoppo della smania, tirò le redini allo scalpitare della rabbia.

(QP RR II 273)

Intolerant of this new mess of the dying patient and yet cautious and pitying, the imagination of Doctor Ingravallo kicked, bucked, galloped, heard and saw: he was seeing and already dismissing the coffin without drapery, of poplar planks [...] Don Ciccio restrained the galloping of his delirium, tugged at the reins of his pawing rage.

(AM 384)

In both of these occasions, the departure from the methods of science (from analysis to prolepsis) is depicted as something like a somatic ailment, or at least something that has physical symptoms. We have the "cold sweat" to begin

with, then the “delirium” in the final scene. In both these examples, we are dealing with phenomena outside of the world of the senses: the “dreams and fairy tales” and the “imagination”, but we are experiencing them in explicitly concrete, sensual ways. In the second example, we have the image of a horse, perhaps, gone out of control. The kicking, bucking and galloping are frighteningly real and extremely unpleasant to imagine. The first example is even more nightmarish as Common Sense “with that latrine-like breath” mocking Don Ciccio’s conclusions. Here Gadda is showing how the brutality of the *inner* world of a character can be simply too much for the instrumental rationality that Ingravallo would have by choice. The attempt to impose rationality in this sphere leads, for Don Ciccio, to nightmare and loss of control.

4: 4 The Educated Hidalgo

Gonzalo Pirobutirro is another character who cannot quite make science fit his world. From his experiments with his old cat, as a boy, he shows himself to be of a rational bent of mind: even his reading material, the gospels, does not preclude the scientist’s interest in the world of the senses: in fact it lends weight to my suspicion, because anyone reading the Gospels outside of church must be doing so for motives of historiography. Whether that is, or is not the case

(although he does study Greek, too) Gonzalo speaks like a man intrigued and influenced – deeply – by the scientific method, but not necessarily someone who has made the sciences his study. Far more than Ingravallo, then, he resembles the common man (ironically in this case) of the modern world. His way of speaking, of thinking, even, is so bound up in the scientific method that he cannot help but be *rational*, but at the same time, he stands before a real man of scientific learning – the doctor – as a child, easily hoodwinked and placated by bismuth that the chemist sells on to him at a huge markup.

This idea of Gonzalo as a man who has an idea of the theory of things, of method, rather than of practice, is made explicit in one particular moment in the flow of his conversation with the Doctor in his garden.

Aveva, della legge, un concetto sui generis, non appreso alla lettura dell'editto, ma consustanziato nell'essere, biologicamente ereditario. E faticava a riconoscere la specie della legge in un abuso o in un arbitrio, tanto più, anche, in una soperchieria.
(CDD RR II 650)

He had, of the law a sui generis concept; not learned from reading the edict, but consubstantiated in his being, biologically heredity. And it cost him an effort to recognize the species of the law in an abuse or arbitrary act, even more, also, in an imposition.
(AG 105)

He inherits a way, in short, of dealing with the law: it is part of his being, just as the intellect of humanity, according to the positivists, is an innate sense-making machine. This is the way that Gonzalo actually reacts to most things: there is the generality, the theory, the method that he can work with and then there is that which is outside his sphere, the practical and real. It must be said that this impression the reader gets of Gonzalo is gleaned from the things he says and the actions he attributed to him rather than by the fact of the matter. The younger Pirobutirro is an engineer. He has travelled, he has fought in the war. He earns from his work “enough to live on” (AG 143). In short, he seems to have made a success of himself. It is only in the rumours and half-truths, the exaggerated stories and calumnies of the peasants that Gonzalo is made to look like a fool, only in the mind of the mother that he pales in comparison to his dead brother. But notice the book that Gonzalo is imagined to be reading while the doctor walks towards the villa:

Nella sua villa senza parafulmine, circondato di peri, e conseguentemente di pere, l'ultimo hidalgo leggeva il fondamento della metafisica dei costumi.

Ha! Ha!

(CDD RR II 605)

In his villa without lightning rods, surrounded by pear trees, and consequently by pears, the last hidalgo was reading *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*.

Ha! Ha!

4: 4 a The Hidago and the Doctor

The mocking laugh is indicative of the Doctor's practical attitude towards the world. In fact he is the opposite of Gonzalo: while he deals with the practical world and participates in it on several planes,¹³⁹ he is aware of Gonzalo's world and Gonzalo's self image. The problem that Gonzalo faces is revealed in subtle ways during his conversation with the Doctor.

Il figio dovè concedere ai formaggini di entrare anche loro nel cerchio doloroso della appercezione. Era il bagaglio del mondo, del fenomènico mondo. L'evolversi di una consecuzione che si sdipana ricca, dal tempo [...]

Li sistemò come poté, i formaggini, in quel campo oltraggioso di non-forme: in quel caravanserraglio d'impedimenti d'ogni maniera: cicale cipolle zòccoli, bronzi ebefrènici, gozzocretine dalla nascita [...]

Ma tutto, del tempo, gli diveniva stanchezza, stupidità.

(CDD RR II 627)

The son had to permit the cheeses to enter the painful circle of his apperception. This was the world's baggage, of the world of phenomena – the evolution of a sequence that unravels richly, from time [...]

He arranged them as best he could, those wheel-like forms of cheese, in that outrageous field of nonforms: in that caravansary of impedimenta of every sort: cicadas onions clogs, hebephrenic

¹³⁹ We recall the long conversation with Battistina (AG 53-60), in which the doctor is shown to take an interest in the lives even of the peasants: "'E voi come va?...'" le chiese paternamente il dottore. 'Io?' meravigliò la donna." (CDD RR II 614) ("And how are things with you?" the doctor asked her paternally. 'Me?' the woman was amazed" (AG 58).

bronzes, paleo-Celtic Josés, Battistinas faithful through the decades,
goiter-cretin from birth [...]
But everything, in time, became weariness to him, stupidity.
(AG 75-76)

Or again, at the end of chapter three:

“Dentro, io, nella mia casa, con mia madre: e tutti i Giuseppi e le Battistine e le Pi... le Beppe, tutti i nipoti ciucchi e trombati in francese o in matematica di tutti i colonnelli del Maradagàl... Via, via! fuori!... fuori tutti! Questa è, e deve essere, la mia casa... nel mio silenzio... la mia povera casa...”
(QP RR II 639)

“Inside, I put them, in my house, with my mother: and all the Josés and the Battistinas and the Pep--- the Beppas, all the jackass grandsons screwed in French or mathematics of all the colonels of Maradagàl ... away, away with them! Out with them all! This is, and must be, my house ... in my silence ... my poor house.”
(AG 90-91)

Apart from, perhaps, reminding us of Schopenhauer ranting about Noise, Gonzalo reveals himself to us through his rants, and Gadda allows the narration to fill in the gaps. The problem is the complexity of the world: Gonzalo has an excellent idea of how the world ought to be, how it ought to work – “with all that mechanical knowledge you have in your head” as the Doctor says (AG 76) – but cannot cope with the entirety of the world in all its complexity. Hence the semi-nonsensical lists (“cicadas onions clogs, hebephrenic bronzes, paleo-Celtic Josés, Battistinas”), hence the demand for silence: Gonzalo needs time to think,

but the world will not be tamed by his intellect, nor will it run in time to his thought, so that his perception is not deranged. Time is something that Gonzalo feels, he is pained by its unnoticed passing. His concern for his mother ("Why doesn't she come back, now? She's aged frightfully." AG 84), is only partly due to filial affection: she unconsciously marks for him the passing of time. Or rather, the loss of time. The time has run out for the family: they are at the end of time. That is why it is appropriate that Gonzalo is said by Battistina to have smashed a watch under his foot: if there were still time, he could make sense of the world. But everything happens at once, details are piled on top of each other: cicadas onions clogs.

Dombroski notes an intertwining between

The human, mechanical and animal worlds, making them coexist ... in the human figure [...] ... The grotesque is violent, comic satire: the goiter overwhelms the individual ...and finally, with the unexpected image of the photographer hiding under his cloth, commenting obliquely on the photographic exactness of the picture.
(Dombroski 1999 52-3)

The moment to which Dombroski refers here ("come il fotografo sotto la tela" CDD, RR II 609) surely brings to mind not only the "photographic exactness" that Dombroski explicitly brings our attention to, but also the "mechanical" world that he suggests. The photograph brings to mind a particular type of

mechanics: the quantized kind. Battistina and Doctor Higueroa both reside in a practical kind of world, but the photograph is proof of a different world, one of quanta, photo-electric effects and Uncertainty Principles. Gonzalo is still struggling, not with the same practical world of the Doctor, but with an outdated conception of mechanics. The fish-wife and the laundry woman are safe, because the everyday world of objects continues the same as it did before: the difference is in the theory, the realms of the very small and the very fast: or indeed in the realm of the obsessive theorist. The fact that the photographer is, as in the popular image, “under his cloth” (AG 53) means he remains concealed to the objects of his art; in the same way, the truth of the manifold interpretations, multiple identities and confusion – the self-same things that trouble Gonzalo – are concealed to both servant and physician in their practicality. Higueroa is still stuck in a world in which the rules are clear, and at the precise moment that he considers Gonzalo as a possible suitor for his daughter, he stumbles upon the reason for the younger Pirobutirro’s anxieties.

“Lo stato attuale occlude un potenziale mutamento” argomentò, “e potenza ed atto son madre e figlio, nel nostro aristotelico mondo.”
(CDD RR II 597)

“The present state obstructs a potential change,” he argued, “and potentiality and act are mother and son, in our Aristotelian world.”
(AG 37)

It is quite a stretch to imagine the world in which Gonzalo lives as Aristotelian, even bigger than the stretch required to imagine Gonzalo married to one of the Doctor's daughters. But living in an Aristotelian world – or at least one that it is Laplacian – is precisely what the Hidalgo strives to do. His bewilderment at the state of the world, his back-and-forward conversation with the Doctor, his distaste for the peasants, all boils down to the difficulty he has in reconciling the world of his books with the world he lives in. The gospels will not avail him – he is forced to throw them to one side when the church bells ring – and his Aristotle will not help him as he struggles to make sense of the mechanical world around him.

In this, Gonzalo is a wonderfully autobiographical expression of the position that Carlo Emilio Gadda finds himself in. As we discussed in 1.5.4 above, the world of Christianity (the gospels) has to be discarded, set aside as no more than a historical curiosity, or of symbols that may be used to express oneself. The same issue, however, persists in the study of the sciences. Gonzalo cannot reconcile the world of Aristotle with that of the electron: Gadda finds himself in the same position. When Gonzalo acts in his state of confusion, he murders his mother. Gadda merely *writes* the murder of his mother, which psychically

amounts to the same thing. To avoid the necessity of committing the crime, however, Gadda did try to adopt a philosophical position that would unify what he knew of the scientific tradition and the early twentieth century's leaps forward in the sciences. That will be considered in the next chapter.

5: Philosophy of Science

Gadda's background in the sciences greatly affected the way he thought, that much is clear from the outset. But where in his texts does he allow this to come to the surface, and what can we learn from these instances? In this section I will address these questions while offering some background to Gadda's own thoughts as a philosopher. This, however, is not the place for an in-depth survey of Gadda's method or a digression into the history of philosophy: where I feel background is necessary or illuminating, I will provide it. In any case, perhaps the philosophy Gadda has his characters adopt will always be the most interesting, and for that reason we will return again to Francesco Ingravallo in this chapter.

5: 1 That Awful Philosopher

Francesco Ingravallo, a character who has come to dominate my discussions in this dissertation. I find Don Ciccio at the end of each paper chase, at the end of the avenue. The philosophy that is introduced in the *incipit* to *Quer pasticciaccio* is, of course, incomplete: one might even say that it is a rather hackneyed take on life in some respects. The singular thing is that our reactions throughout the novel, and in my case, throughout the reading of Gadda, have already been predicted. "That's exactly what Ingravallo said to me." (AM 5). This is the

sensation that we all feel in the course of reading the novel and especially at the finale when we are redirected back to the beginning in search for the answer that we expected to find at the end. So what does Gadda give us to work on?

The importance of the “converging causes” has been noted, in the first place by Roscioni (“*Le cause, e non la causa*. Perché molteplici sono sempre le ragioni che concorrono a determinare i fatti, e le cose” Roscioni 1975 32) and in other places since, perhaps most pertinently by Calvino, as has the “eros” that Ingravallo regrets, but here it might be profitable to put ourselves rather in the shoes of the philosopher of science and treat Ingravallo the detective as an experimenter in the laboratory of the world. The door is opened to us in this regard by the effort that Gadda makes to use words that suggest a scientific setting, certain expressions that are intended to have us view the passage as more than just the “belated Italian version of the trite *cherchez la femme*” writ large.

In order to establish a difference between the more scientific parts of Ingravallo’s philosophy and the parts belonging more to the traditions of Kant or Spinoza, it might be helpful to summarise the distinction that is nowadays

accepted as the benchmark of good scientific thinking, introduced in 1934 by Karl Popper.

Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, published in 1934, and therefore not too distant from the *Meditazione Milanese* mentioned above, sets out a new way of thinking about science, using the powerful new tool of Falsification. As Ray Scott Percival says in his introduction to "The Karl Popper Web" (www.tkpw.net):

In one majestic and systematic attack, psychologism, naturalism, inductionism, and logical positivism are swept away and replaced by a set of methodological rules called Falsificationism. Falsificationism is the idea that science advances by unjustified, exaggerated guesses followed by unstinting criticism. Only hypotheses capable of clashing with observation reports are allowed to count as scientific.
(Percival 2005)

If we are to allow this as the benchmark for treating Ingravallo's philosophy as scientific, we are presented with quite a difficulty. For a start, we must endeavour to distinguish those statements made that are descriptive or those that provide background. Then we must collect statements that can be treated as propositions, and examine those to see if the methodology of Falsification can be applied to them. If it cannot, we will be unable to discuss the propositions any further as "scientific". It is not enough for our purposes to discuss "Scienza" in

the terms that Pireddu does in the *Pocket Gadda Encyclopedia*: we must dissect the text.

Ne sa qualcosa il Ciccio Ingravallo del *Pasticciaccio*, per il quale “le inopinate catastrofi non sono mai la conseguenza o l’effetto che dir si voglia d’un unico motivo, d’una causa al singolare: ma sono un vortice” (QP RR II 16), la combinazione “di tutta una rosa di causali” (QP RR II 17) che si abbattono sulla ragione del singolo e del mondo “a molinello (come i sedici venti della rosa dei venti quando s’avviluppano a tromba in una depressione ciclonica)”, e che convergono nel proverbiale groviglio gaddiano, “o garbuglio, o gnommero.”
(Pireddu)

From this, only the statement “le catastrofi non sono mai la conseguenza o l’effetto [...] d’un unico motivo” is a predictive one. We may easily imagine it to be falsifiable as well. The other statement that we can reformulate from Ingravallo’s philosophy is “un certo movente affettivo, un tanto o, direste oggi, un quanto di affettività, un certo “quanto di erotia” si mescolava [...] ai delitti.” The way that both these statements are phrased should immediately arouse our attention. They are both presented as Ingravallo’s own thinking (“Sosteneva, fra l’altro”/ “Voleva significare”), they both contain a hesitation over the correct framing vocabulary (“che dir si voglia” / “direste oggi”), resulting in the more obviously “scientific” word being preferred (“effetto” / “quanto”), they are the only statements regarding Ingravallo’s philosophizing that can be described as falsifiable propositions.

If we then take these two statements in isolation – that crimes are never caused by one simple motive; that “love” or “eros” appears as a factor in all investigations – we have something to work with. The rest of the novel is therefore a case study, a presentation of two crimes that we are to consider in the light of these statements. Taken in this way, the philosophizing of the incipit is far from “una terminologia da medici dei matti”, not just “parole con non vogliono dir nulla, o quasi nulla”: instead they are central to the fabric of the novel itself, precisely because of the predictive quality they take on as part of a scientific formulation. Instead of being just words, we thoughts of Ingravallo are as a theory to be tested.

This then puts us in the position of observers of the experiment as we read through the novel, we are charged with collecting and evaluating data. The first crime, the robbery of Menegazzi, is presented to us through the eyes of Don Ciccio, and we find that he has prepared the evidence for us beforehand. Menegazzi’s appearance “in scena” – that is, for our observation – is a performance of his theories. In fact, Menegazzi can be seen as the very embodiment of the twin theories of complexity and the quantum of eros. The

former is represented in her confused account, her particular theories (“Mària Vergine! El me gaveva ipotisà...” QP RR II 33) and the impossibility that Ingravallo finds in getting down to simple facts (““Com’era il beretto?” chiese don Ciccio seguitando a scrivere. ‘Gera... Veramente, gnornò, gnornò, no me ricordo ben come che gera, no sarvaria dirghe’” QP RR II 30). The latter we find in the repressed sexuality of the Contessa herself: when she denies that anyone has been in her bedroom, we read that “Don Ciccio lo credeva bene: ma lei ebbe un tono e un “Mària Vergine”, come ammettendo di poter essere sospettata del contrario.” (QP RR II 38). But there is more than this: our two theories are combined in the fabric of Ingravallo’s interpretation of the robbery.

La lunga attesa dell’aggressione a domicilio, pensò Ingravallo, era divenuta coazione: non tanto a lei e a’ suoi atti e pensieri, di vittima già ipotecata, quanto coazione al destino, al “campo di forze” del destino. [...] Perché Ingravallo, similmente a certi nostri filosofi, attribuiva un’anima, anzi un’animaccia porca, a quel sistema di forze e di probabilità che circonda ogni creatura umana[.]
(QP RR II 31)

The reference here to the “filosofi” refers us back to the formulation of the incipit, of course, and herein is the interpretation of the crime in light of those theories that we have plucked from it. The investigation of the crime must continue, of course, in search of the “causale apparente, la causale principe” (QP RR II 17), and we might recall at this point that – while he is not apprehended –

the identity of the thief and the location of the stolen jewels are later discovered in the course of this investigation. This passage is, however a reminder that Ingravallo's philosophy and its predictive power is still essential to his, and our, reading of the episode.

The second crime scene presents more problems than this. The impartiality of the observer is compromised by his connection to the victim, and so our data are obfuscated and refracted. And yet the signs are there for us to read, with or without Ingravallo's assistance. As far as "eros" is concerned, they are clear enough without interpretation.

Il corpo dell povera signora giaceva in una posizione infame, supino, con la gonna di lana grigia e una sottogonna bianca buttate all'indietro, fin quasi al petto: come se qualcuno avesse voluto scoprire il candore affascinante di quel *dessous*, o indagarne lo stato di nettezza.

(QP RR II 58)

The body of the poor lady was lying in an infamous position, supine, the gray wool skirt and a white petticoat thrown back, almost to her breast: as if someone had wanted to uncover the fascinating whiteness of that *dessous*, or inquire into its state of cleanliness.

(AM 67-8)

As for the combination of causes, it is in the build-up of details that the confusion gradually reveals itself to us. Take for example, the initial questioning of Valdarena:

“È lui ch’è capitato pe primo...” fece il Santomaso, un agente. “È stato er primo a entrà qua, in ogni modo,” confermò il Porchettini. “Poi hanno telefonato in questura...”

“Chi ha telefonato?”

“Mah... tutti insieme,” rispose il Valdarena. “Nun capivo più dove fossi. Io, un inquilino der piano sopra, tutte le donne. La portiera nun c’era. La guardiola era chiusa.”

(QP RR II 61)

“He happened to be the first...” Santomaso, one of the policemen, said. “He was the first to come in here, anyway,” Porchettini confirmed. “Then they called the station ...”

“Who called?”

“Why ... all of us together,” Valdarena answered. “I didn’t know where I was or what I was doing. There was me, a man from the floor above, all the women. The concierge wasn’t here. Her lodge was shut up.”

(AM 71)

There is also the detail of the blood being trailed around the apartment, confusing and enraging Ingravallo and diverting the course of the investigation, and the opinion of La Menegazzi that “er disisiete xe el pexor numero” (QP RR II 63), by which the fate of the world – the same that did for her jewels – is invoked, muddying the waters further. So Don Ciccio’s postulates are certainly present at the scene, even if he is too distressed to account for them.

This turns out to be important, because the book ends without giving the reader the closure that the trauma of the murder scene requires. Whether the crime would have been solved if Ingravallo had kept his head in these pages is an idle question – in my opinion, we see only the breakdown of his background philosophy here, and not a dereliction of his investigative duty: he scolds the culprits for trailing blood over the floor, and asks Valdarena some probing questions¹⁴⁰ – but it might lead us to think the crime over with the predictive powers of the twin theories in mind. What are the combining factors in Liliana’s death that are presented to us? Where precisely do we find the “eros”? And can examining these factors help us to identify a potential murderer?

In terms of the combinatory causes that surround Liliana’s death, we may identify chiefly her childlessness, her making of her will, her attraction to her cousin and her treatment of her female servants. It can be seen that many of these factors as presented to us overlap with the “eros” that Ingravallo insists we seek. It is interesting that there are so few factors in the category of “causes”:

¹⁴⁰ In fact, he remembers and semi-congratulates himself on his question during the interview in chapter 3. “Com’è che sete così calmo?” gli aveva domandato: era una trappola. Tutt’altro che calmo.” (QP RR II 75) (“How can you be so calm?” Don Ciccio had asked him: it was a trap. Anything but calm. (AM 93)).

the confusion of the interviews and the inevitable mix-up that results from the parallel investigation of the Menegazzi case leads the reader to imagine Liliana's murder to be a far more complex affair than it in fact is¹⁴¹. The only other factors that might make the list is the disappearance of some of her jewellery, although it seems far from clear that this has anything to do with the crime or that there is anything actually missing, and the present she makes to Valdarena of the watch-chain with the "unlucky" stone replaced. This latter, of course, can be said to fit into the wider category of her attraction to him, although it does open up the possibility of an "occult" or fatalistic cause in line with her making of the will.¹⁴²

In fact, the making of the will is the only "cause" of her death that is not linked directly to her biology and her sex (putting her in a position ironically similar to Menegazzi's). The childlessness and the attraction to the younger – fertile – cousin are obvious enough, and her treatment of the servants seems to, according to the interview with Balducci, emerge from a kind of sexual or reproductive jealousy. Further to this, there is the indication that Liliana's sexuality is somehow altered by her childlessness.

¹⁴¹ This, of course, is evidence of a quite deliberate technique employed by Gadda in the middle chapters.

¹⁴² See also Menegazzi's abhorrence of the number 17.

La personalità di lei, strutturalmente invida al maschio e solo racchetata della prole, quando la prole manchi accede a una sorta di disperata gelosia, e, nel contempo, di sforzata συμπατία [sympatía] sororale nei confronti delle cosessuate.

Accede, potrebbe credersi, a una forma di omoerotia sublimata: cioè a paternità metafisica.

(QP RR II 107)

Her personality, structurally envious of the male and only stilled by offspring, when offspring are missing, gives way to a kind of desperate jealousy and, at the same time, of forced sister-like συμπατία in the regards of her own sex.

It gives way, one might believe, to a form of sublimated homoeroticism: that is to say, to metaphysical paternity.

(AM 140)

This last quotation comes from Don Ciccio's musings on Liliana's state of mind at her drafting of the will – "Chesta è na femmena comme ce ne stanno poche!" (QP RR II 103), as Fumi says – and provides us with a link between the will, which after all is about settling the inheritance of a childless woman, and these other possible "causes". It provides us with a final logical link between all the causes that are presented to us in relation to Liliana's murder.

"Tuttociò è turpe Eros, non Logos" (EP SGF II 247). Gadda's words from the second chapter of *Eros e Priapo* are a perfect fit to this discussion, because what we find here is an overlap, a bleeding of the first theory into the second. We might say Liliana's death is caused not so much by a variety of converging

causes, but by a complex system that arises from a single point. While we have mentioned that the “causale principale” is the one that Ingravallo as a detective is interested in, here is a possible “causale prima”, a point from which the whole tragedy opens from. Quite brilliantly, Gadda shows his hand at this point, managing to subtly link the Aristotelian system of causes to the modern world. This is an example of the synthesis that *Meditazione milanese* is reaching for. Fortunately for Gadda, and for the reader, the world of *Quer pasticciaccio* can be constructed precisely to fit this purpose: the data we receive are brought to us through the narrator’s voice, through the thoughts of Ingravallo, the final choice of the author. What results is a wonderful demonstration of Gadda’s ability as a writer of fiction, if not quite a philosopher of science.

As for the question of the murder, the identity of the murderer, I might suggest in a somewhat playful spirit that we continue to look at *Eros e Priapo* for inspiration, especially the second chapter. In this sustained piece of enraged diatribe, Gadda locates the “appeal” of Fascism in Italy in the libido of the people, singling out particularly women and the young. It is a fascinating piece, and interesting not least because it represents an attack on Fascism from a more-or-less conservative, reactionary standpoint. In any case, what Gadda makes

clear is that, in his opinion, the popularity of Mussolini is directly and inextricably linked to the desire among the young men to “esibirsi stivaluti e armati di coltello al corso: disposti a tutto e in primis a plaudire chi è ‘in alto’” (EP SGF II 245) [display themselves jackbooted and armed with hunting knives: ready for anything, and especially ready to praise those “in power”] and among the women a “ninfomania politica” linked to the glorification of the “Patria”, a glorification that they were to make concrete by the production of as many children as possible. Whatever the value of this sentiment as a piece of political analysis, it is clear that it resonates with the case of Liliana Balducci: could this be a starting point for accusing “Fascism” or Mussolini himself as the murderer?

This suggestion might seem a banality: it isn’t intended to be. Rather, I believe that it is a possible and fruitful reading of Gadda’s text within the framework presented to us by Gadda himself. There is some interesting evidence in the text, as well. We note that Mussolini is present – in the form of his image, of course – at the scene of the murder and that his government is invoked as the reason for the disappearance of Liliana’s wedding ring.¹⁴³ We note also that

¹⁴³ Another perhaps trivial point is that the text says that “Né veniva in mente, allora, di imputarne la sparizione alla patria” (QP RR II 68), not that “la patria” wasn’t responsible for it. (NB The government of Italy asked for wedding rings to be donated to the state to help fund the Ethiopian War (1935-36), some nine years after the period in which the novel is set.)

Liliana succumbs to a personified “Death” (“Affilato nel pallore, il volto: sfinito, emaciato dalla suzione atroce della Morte” (QP RR II 59) “rassegnata alla volontà della Morte” (QP RR II 60), a title that recalls Gadda’s labeling of Mussolini as “Testa di Morto” (QP RR II 203). This is also particularly suggestive as Gadda employs words suggestive of impurity and domination here as he does when describing the Fascists, Mussolini or “those bastards in Political” as Ingravallo thinks of them.

Whatever Gadda’s intentions for the reader might have been regarding the whodunit? project, it is instructive to read the murder of Liliana in this light. There are potentially as many theories about the factors behind the crime as there are readers, but in this case it is particularly interesting to note how we reach this point, through a careful reading of the incipit and daring to take seriously Ingravallo’s credentials as a philosopher of science.

5: 2 Science and Gadda’s Modernism or Postmodernism

Whatever the precise details of Gadda’s own feelings towards his place in the world of science, there can be no question that the difficulty that confronts his characters is the difficulty inherent in paradigmatising the world. The scientific

method is a wonderful tool for setting up a paradigm, working on hypotheses and the constant revision of *facta* in the light of *data*. The issue, as Ingravallo, Don Gonzalo and Baronfo all discover, is that real life cannot be simply compartmentalized and analysed discreetly. There is too much in the interaction of humans to account for. There are too many paradigm shifts, too many murders, too many voices: too much for our minds to deal with. This is the world that Gadda sensed prematurely upon his return from the Great War, the world that saw him, and tens of thousands of others like him, put trust in the drastic political solution of Fascism.¹⁴⁴ His rage against Mussolini, as we have seen, is that of the betrayed. In terms of politics, so far, so bad, then. However, his literature does not quite lead us into the nightmare that later authors will. Gadda stands on the cusp of post-modernism. His literary world is still the world of Manzoni, not that of writers like J.G. Ballard, who saw the same contradictions in society and literature, but had to have – or felt he had to have – a different response.

¹⁴⁴ I find Stellardi's reading persuasive: "non c'è dubbio che il Gadda reduce di guerra, nei primi anni venti, vede in Mussolini e nel fascismo l'unica alternativa al caos, all'anarchia, alla dissoluzione definitiva del paese come entità etica e nazionale[.]" (Stellardi 136-7) [there is no doubt that the demobbed Gadda in the early nineteen-twenties saw in Mussolini and in Fascism the only alternative to chaos, anarchy and the definitive dissolution of the country as a national and ethical entity.] Cfr also Hainsworth "Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Gadda". *Contemporary Perspectives*. Toronto: UTP, 1997 pp 221-41.

Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy. Thermo-nuclear weapons systems and soft-drink commercials coexist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudo-events, science and pornography. ... Given these transformations, what is the main task facing the writer? Can he, any longer, make use of the techniques and perspectives of the traditional 19th century novel, with its linear narrative, measured chronology, its consular characters grandly inhabiting their domains within an ample time and space?
(Ballard 1995 i-ii)

He goes on to suggest that the writer's role is more akin to that of the modern scientist: hypothesising, experimenting, exploring. But that does not quite explain the nightmare vision of the future that he is introducing in this short essay. *Crash* is a novel of experimentation, certainly, a hypothesis concerning the near future. It is an exploration of the signs of our culture – or at least the culture of the 1970s – and just what they might mean. But it is curiously devoid of any attempt to avoid the fate that seems to await us, and that distinguishes the modernist Gadda from the postmodern. Gadda is still striving for synthesis, even if all his literary experiments end up following their fate to the end, even if the end cannot be finally written. While Gadda entertains with subtle references to the past, Ballard does almost the opposite, promising an ending that we know is historically impossible. Gadda refers to the grotesque figure of Mussolini and we remember our Pathé news reels; Ballard tells us that Vaughan intends to die

in a car crash with Elizabeth Taylor. We know that not to have been the case. We therefore know that Vaughan will die, in that sense, unfulfilled.

This is not meant to be a negative reflection on Ballard's output. His later novels *Cocaine Nights* and *Super Cannes* are splendidly, heartbreakingly close to our present reality, a great pastiche of the near-future. But there is no hope in him, no feeling of struggle. For Francesco Ingravallo, the ending of the chase in *Quer pasticciaccio* is traumatic, desperate. We could argue that Charles Prentice's fate in *Cocaine Nights* is similar to Ingravallo's, both of them investigating a crime that remains unsolved, both following clues that lead to more confusion rather than clarification. Both men have a motive beyond that of simple duty to solve the crime: in Ingravallo's case, the murder victim was a close friend, perhaps he was even in love with her; for Prentice, his brother is charged with the crime. Compare, however, the dénouement of Ballard's novel with Gadda's, as Prentice stands beside the body of a man, Bobby Crawford, who he has found dead on a tennis court with Cabrera, the police detective, approaching:

Did he already know, as he walked towards me, that I would take responsibility for the death? Crawford's mission would endure, and the festivals of the Residencia Costasol would continue to fill the sky with their petals and balloons, as the syndicates of guilt sustained their dream.

(Ballard 1996 329)

Prentice's passive acceptance of the fate that has been marked out for him from page one is in stark contrast to Ingravallo's rage against his prime suspect, Assuntina. The difference between these two approaches stems from the way in which the writers choose to tackle the modern world of science and technology.

Perhaps Ballard, coming from a later period, has simply seen more to be afraid of. Certainly, he is in a position to have experienced the postmodern world of mass communication and mass audience (what he calls the "soft-drink commercials" and "pornography" in the introduction to *Crash*, as quoted above), but he has not had Gadda's experience of growing up in a world of positivism, a world where science is supposed to help us make sense of the world. For Ballard, a man who was 14 years old, and in an internment camp in China, when the uranium-235 bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the plutonium bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the world of the scientist was never one in which one could fully trust.

In this sense, Gadda is outmoded now, his view of the intersection between science and literature seems nostalgic, unrealistic. As readers, we cannot really

imagine the world that Gadda grew up in: too much water has passed under that bridge. We cannot forgive the men behind the Manhattan Project, we cannot imagine a world in which Newton is always right, we cannot be without the quark and the solar neutrino.

The truly interesting thing about Gadda's use of science is that his literature – his characters, his plots, his very style of writing – recognises this obsolescence.¹⁴⁵ His creations end, or fail to end, with the multiplicity of viewpoints predicated by Einstein. His characters face uncertainty, the inability to know, the overload of information. Even his style is heavy with the jargon and doubt of the scientific movement. For me, Gadda writes the early twentieth century's view of science better than anyone else: he stands in the bright light of positivism but his pen scratches in the dark, drawing figures he can barely see in the new, confused world.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Gadda's style has been seen by other critics before now both as a result of and as a means of undermining a positivistic outlook. Most notably in Zublena (2002), where Gadda's language is seen as a product of his scientific training (Zublena 2002 33) and in Contini (1963, 1998). Other writers who have tackled the theme Mileschi in his overview of *Meditazione milanese*, Pedriali (2010) and Stellardi (2004).

¹⁴⁶ See also Rorty (1997) in which the American philosopher uses the term 'pragmatism' to discuss the postmodern approach to Enlightenment figures, and in which he sees the beginnings of a modern approach in Spinoza - a thinker much appreciated by Gadda himself - and the way that he is compared and opposed with Hobbes. In the light of Rorty's work, Gadda can be seen as a continuation of the line of thinkers and writers that take the Enlightenment project to its logical conclusion.

Conclusion

My intention in the writing of this thesis was to provide the reader with a means of entry into the reading of Carlo Emilio Gadda's work, and specifically *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, by concentrating analysis on the use that he makes of cultural Christianity and the world of science. The two-part division to the thesis, mirroring the now almost traditional division of the humanities and science, or religion and rationality was decided upon early in its composition. In the first section, we have seen the importance of the Catholic imagery in general and in specific cases for Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, while the second part considered the impact of his scientific training on the novel and his larger work.

In the first chapter, it was necessary to introduce the reader to some salient facts of Gadda's biography, whilst also explaining something of what it meant to be 'Catholic' at the time Gadda was maturing as a person and a writer. The importance of this step is in establishing Gadda's relationship to a religion that he ultimately rejected, and to state that the culture of Christianity still affected him at a crucial moment in his development.

This case having been made, I considered aspects of Catholic culture that appear in *Quer pasticciaccio*. In the following chapters, Saints, Churches and Religious art are all discussed, and it is instructive how each seems to have a consistency in their application, whether it is in names, the topographical and geographical landscape of the novel or in sexual and deviant imagery. Finally, in this part of the thesis, the topics of colour and material science were introduced, linking the theme of painting to Gadda's life as a scientist.

At the beginning of the second part, we again revisited Gadda's biography, in particular regard to his education and career as an electrical engineer in order to emphasise the importance that the era he lived had on his work. This led us into a consideration of his continuing interest in science, and in particular mathematics and theoretical physics, even after his abandonment of a working life in engineering, which was followed through in an examination of his collection of books.

The second chapter of the second section outlines the state of physics and "electrical sciences" from the turn of the 20th century into the 1930s, from Maxwell to Einstein. It questions what effect the rapid changes in this field of

human understanding might have had on an artist who not only lived through them, but was fully conversant with them and could understand them on a deep level.

Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio* has come to be considered as a starting point in the development of the Italian crime fiction genre and this was foremost in the planning of the third chapter of the second section. In this chapter, I made the point that the novel represents a cardinal point in the history of detective fiction worldwide, and I demonstrated the importance that the scientific worldview has for the genre. In fact, Gadda's privileged position as a man of science allows him to make a leap forward in the genre, one that posits, for instance, the postmodernism of Pynchon.

In the next two chapters, the focus returns to the text of *Quer pasticciaccio*, and we are finally invited to re-read the novel in through the lens of the scientific method, to reconsider the conclusion, to repent of our early readings, almost. The application of Popper's principle/method of falsifiability to the speculations of Ingravallo and the available data allows us to postulate a conclusion to an inconclusive investigation.

Just as the last chapter of the first part of the thesis ended in a digression away from religious art towards material science in order to foreshadow the second part, the final chapter attempts to look forward to one area in which there is scope for expansion in the future: comparative literature. While Gadda has been compared in the past with such authors as Joyce and Céline, I believe there is a case to be made for joining the name of the Gran Lombardo to those of Pynchon and Ballard, as I argue in chapters three and five, respectively, of the second part of the thesis.

While Gadda might be a difficult and complex writer, and while this might be due equally to his temperament or his artistic choice, it is clear that much in his work arises from contradiction – between the religious and the rational, the sacred and the temporal, the eternal and the political – but also from the position he found himself in and the time he lived through. He is a man with the attitudes of the 1800s who saw action in the First World War. He is an atheist Catholic, a Newtonian quantum physicist, representing the crises of his lifetime in his style and his themes. He is not simply a man of contradictions, but one who lives them and relishes them and revels in the torments they bring.

That is why *Quer pasticciaccio* ends as it does: the only possible answer to the chaos is in silence, that ultimate silence that is the greatest triumph of the writer's pen.

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